

A WOMAN IN SPITE OF HERSELF.

VOL. III.



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A WOMAN IN SPITE OF HERSELF.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"LIVE IT DOWN,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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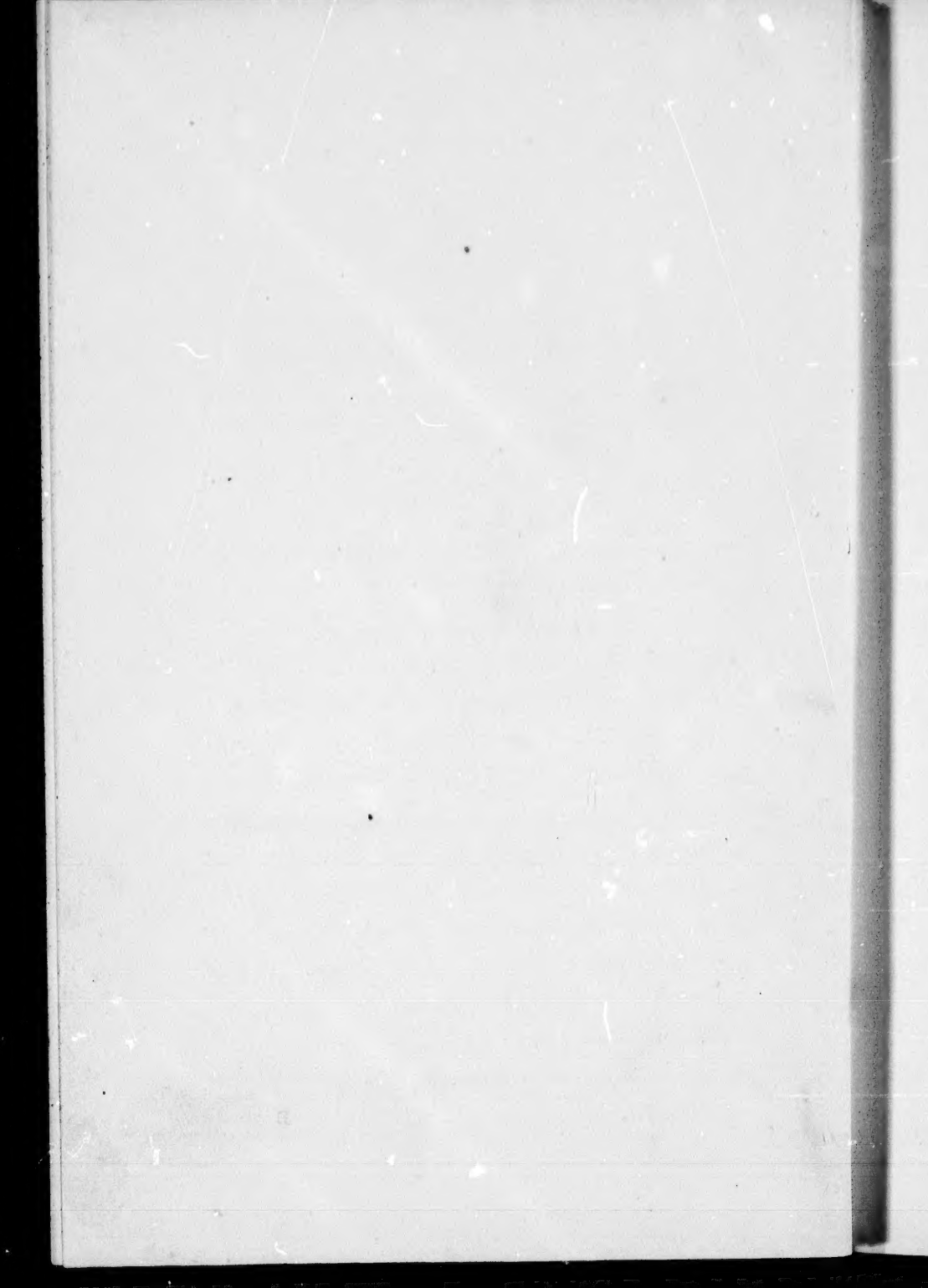
PART II.

CONTINUED.

UNDER THE CLOTH.

VOL. III.

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A WOMAN IN SPITE OF HERSELF.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW CURATE CRITICIZES POULTRY AND IS
REMINDED OF OLD TIMES.

WHEN Mr. Kinsman returned the Squire's call after the lapse of a couple of days, the Squire was, unfortunately, not at home; but the clergyman met with a cordial reception from Mrs. Porchester, whom he encountered on the steps of the Hall's roadward portal on his arrival at the stately entrance. Dressed in a brown silk robe, black lace shawl, and white-plumed bonnet, the elegant Mrs. Porchester was equipped for an afternoon's drive in the carriage, which was already standing at the door when the curate walked up the carriage-way.

Mrs. Porchester was abundantly affable and gracious. It gave her the greatest pleasure to make Mr. Kinsman's acquaintance. She congratulated herself on the visitor's timely appearance; for, had he arrived at the Hall two minutes later, she would have been off for her drive, and have missed him. The horses could wait for half an hour or an hour. It was not incumbent on her to consider the feelings of horses, who were designed by Providence to wait on their owner's pleasure. Had she been bound to keep an appointment, to meet a friend at a railway station, or be present at any particular place at a particular time, she would have felt it necessary to fulfil her obligations by an act of self-sacrifice. But happily the call which she designed to make that afternoon on Lady Tunstall, of Palgrave Priory, was a visit that might be postponed for an hour, or a day, or even a week, without any violation of Christian rule. She was therefore at liberty for once to gratify herself, and rather than take her drive she would like to conduct Mr. Kinsman through the gardens, and show him her hen-

farm. "But," urged the lady, suddenly remembering herself, "I must not fail to consider your wishes. Perhaps you have walked enough, and would rather not take any more exercise." The case was quite otherwise with Mr. Kinsman, who would like above all things to accompany the lady through the gardens, and see her hen-farm.

So Mrs. Porchester had her way, and, instead of chatting with the curate in the drawing-room, she led him round the garden, showed him the cedar-walk, the fish-pond, the bowling-green, the conservatories, and then carried him off by a shady walk through nearly half a mile of shrubbery and plantation, to her hen-farm, an establishment consisting of a capacious duck-pond, fowl-houses, dove-cotes, turkey-pens, and a cottage for the female servant who had charge of the feathered creatures. The yard and buildings of Mrs. Porchester's little farm were enclosed by a high wall, which shut in the fowls and kept out thieves.

The hen-farm was one of the results of Mrs. Porchester's propensity to sacrifice herself for the good of others.

Virtue is its own reward. Mrs. Porchester's virtue rewarded itself munificently. From childhood upwards it had yielded her a considerable revenue of self-satisfaction and material advantage. At sixteen years of age it enabled Maria Coggs to get many a pleasant holiday which, had it not been for her prudent amiability, she would have spent in the dull and poorly-victualled vicarage of Blathering-in-the-marshes (commonly called Blaring), which was the only preferment of her needy father, the Reverend Newton Coggs, second cousin of Hardy Clissold's mother. In due course it procured her new bonnets, silk dresses, velvet mantles, which Mrs. Clissold of Sunningwold used to give the poor vicar's daughter in return for the pains she took to play the part of a congenial companion to the long, shapeless gaby who subsequently became our friend Squire Clissold. For some years no ball or other large party was ever given at Sunningwold Hall to which Maria was not invited, because she was so very good-natured to her cousin, and always appeared glad to dance with him, though he never

attended her through a quadrille, nor pulled her round in a waltz, without stamping on her toes. The more cruelly Hardy trod on her feet, the more joyously she smiled. For the injuries inflicted upon her by the young man's sprawling feet, she was, however, liberally compensated by Mrs. Clissold's liberality. Her readiness to sacrifice herself for her ungainly cousin was so complete that she was even prepared to surrender herself to him for life, as his partner for better and worse, when it became her duty to sacrifice herself in another way. Dick Porchester (then a young captain home from India on furlough) made her an offer, on the understanding that, on becoming his wife, she would return with him to India. On this prospect being put before her, it was obvious to Maria that she ought to yield to her suitor's solicitations, and sacrifice herself for the captain's and her father's sake.

Her father was poor, and anxious to see her settled in life; the captain would be a solitary and wretched exile if she declined to accompany him to the east. Maria saw the path of duty,

and took it. In India, also, self-sacrifice proved a paying concern ; every little sum that she invested in it paid Mrs. Porchester a hundred per cent.; none of her sacrifices were fruitless. On returning from India, with her widow's pension, and the three thousand pounds which consistent self-denial had enabled her to accumulate, notwithstanding Colonel Porchester's extravagance, she made her grandest achievement in the way of self-immolation. The miserable solitariness of her cousin Hardy, who had recently become a widower, the needs of his young children, bereft of their mother, cut Maria Porchester to the heart. She would relinquish London and the attractions of fashionable gaiety in order to cherish the dear infants and console their parent. So she gave up her rather confined and extremely dingy lodgings in Dorset Square, Regent's Park, and without a murmur consented to become the mistress of Sunningwold Hall. Throughout the ten years of her residence at Sunningwold she had never been heard to speak repiningly of the pleasures which she denied herself by persisting in this course of

self-abnegation. She always spoke cheerfully about them, and often thanked Heaven that her training in childhood had made self-sacrifice a delight to her. Time had not robbed Maria of her romantic generosity of disposition. Maria Porchester was as ready as ever Maria Coggs had been to sacrifice herself still further, and to unite herself yet more closely to Hardy Clissold, should it ever appear that it was her duty to do so.

On taking up her abode at Sunningwold, Mrs. Porchester discovered, to her surprise, that the Hall was very inadequately provided with new laid eggs and poultry—a defect in the arrangements of the place which the new mistress set herself to amend without delay, for the sake of Cousin Hardy and his offspring. Eggs and fowls were as necessary as good milk for the nutriment of delicate children. Though she had a strong nervous repugnance for all large domesticated birds—an aversion that in her girlhood had occasioned her to abhor the shrieking of hens and the shrill music of roosters—Mrs. Porchester established her hen-

nery ; and that it might thoroughly effect the ends for which it was established, she was determined to conquer her dislike to fowls, and manage the hen-farm herself, with the assistance of Ann Dawson, a clever hen-wife. The enterprise was eminently successful. The farm produced so much that, after supplying the Hall gratuitously with feathered poultry of all kinds, and eggs of divers sorts, Mrs. Porchester (trading under the name of Ann Dawson) was able to furnish the poulterers of Needham Regis with turkeys, ducks, pigeons, pea-fowls, and chickens, in hampers, that were continually passing to and fro between Sunningwold and Needham Regis. Under ordinary circumstances, the hen-farm would have been a lucrative concern ; under Mrs. Porchester's favourable circumstances it was a very paying business. She paid no rent for the premises ; the Squire supplied all the corn consumed by the fowls, and paid Ann Dawson's wages, in consideration of the food which the farm sent to his kitchen ; Mrs. Porchester paid all the sums, that flowed to her from Needham Regis higglers, to her

account at the Needham Regis Bank. Persons who know more about henneries than I do are of opinion that Mrs. Porchester's hen-farm yielded her clear four hundred pounds a year. Anyhow, virtue was once more its own reward. And Mrs. Porchester never saw Hardy Clissold crack an egg or carve a fowl at his own table without remembering, with self-complacency, how she had sacrificed herself to provide him with the comforts of life.

The graceful lady stooped low as she passed through the boundary of her place of business, so that her dainty bonnet should not touch the top of the narrow doorway through which she conducted her new acquaintance; and, ere she rose again to her full height, she gathered together artistically the skirt of her dress, so that, on being lifted above the litter of the yard, the silk fell in tasteful folds to within two or three inches of the wearer's trim and agile feet.

Mr. Kinsman felt, or feigned to feel, a sufficiently strong interest in Mrs. Porchester's live stock—admired the turkeys and “come-backs,” criticised the pigeons, declared the “setting-

house" a model of judicious contrivance, and, following his entertainer from one point of the establishment to another, carried for her convenience the bag of grain which Ann Dawson brought out of the corn-room, to the lively interest of the feathered colony.

"Ten years since," Mrs. Porchester explained to the clergyman, "when I decided to take charge of my cousin Hardy's children, the Hall was so ill-supplied with poultry that Mr. Clissold actually used to be in the habit of buying chickens and new-laid eggs of his tenants. All this is my doing. The place requires a great deal of attention. It gives me a prodigious amount of trouble. But I am of opinion, Mr. Kinsman, that a woman is only doing her duty when she makes exertions and sacrifices for the comfort of others."

Mr. Kinsman concurred in the sentiment, and, having returned the grain-poke to Ann Dawson, passed once again through the low doorway.

On emerging from the slip of plantation that ran along the wall of the hen-farm, Mrs. Porchester descried Ada and Jemmy in the park

under the shadow of a clump of elms—the boy lying on a rug upon the grass; Ada sitting on her sketching-stool, and working at a water-colour sketch of a corner of the Hall, with a bit of the village just visible through the trees in the background.

“There are our children. Come and make their acquaintance,” the lady suggested.

It would give Mr. Kinsman great pleasure to be introduced to the young people.

On reaching the ground, where Mrs. Porches-ter introduced the visitor, with no excess of formality, to the Squire’s children, Mr. Kinsman saw that Ada was even more beautiful than he had thought her on the previous Sunday. Just five feet two inches in height, exquisitely modelled in her figure, and delicately finished in all the details of her personal attractiveness, she was a singularly lovely and fascinating girl. No one ever objected against her that she was diminutive; for her aristocratic style and piquant air made beholders unobservant of her smallness. Perhaps her aquiline nose was just a trifle too prominent (though I am disposed to

think it a faultless feature); but the most critical connoisseur of feminine beauty could have found nothing to regret in her small rounded cheeks and chin, or in the deep violet eyes, and dark auburn-brown eyebrows that contrasted so strongly with the fairness of her complexion and the lightness of her golden hair. Ada's shining tresses were of that delicate, glistening amber hue which some people think to be attainable only by artificial treatment of natural hair. Every now and then one sees such hair on a sparkling blonde in a London ball-room, where, even by candle-light, the genuineness of its colour is discernible by a peculiar glossy, sparkling brightness, never visible in the masses of bleached, washed-out, dried-up stuff, which results from all attempts to counterfeit its inimitable properties.

There are feminine lips—usually well-shaped, but not seldom too thick to please the fastidious observer—which are properly described by the familiar epithet, “kissable.” Ada's lips were exquisite in colour, form, liveness, expression, but they did not belong to the order “kiss-

able." They were created to be looked at, studied, scrutinized with delight—not to be touched. If I were to spin phrases on the subject for half-a-dozen pages, I should fail to convey to the reader a notion of the subtle witchery of those mobile lips, that were but slightly indebted to the girl's voice for their ravishing influence. Nor is it less difficult to say how Ada's complexion differed from the colour of most English girls in being neither sanguine nor pale. Talk of marble shoulders and neck of snowy whiteness! Ada had neither. The lily and rose of her colour were uniformly blended into one soft, delicious, creamy pinkness which no amount of pearl-powder could have reduced to snowiness—no amount of violent exercise have raised to redness. In another respect, her delicate complexion was heat-proof. No sun could tan or disfigure it. Fashion required Ada to wear a parasol, and therefore, being altogether womanly in her tastes and weaknesses, she wore one in public. But though she was often to be seen gliding over the terraces of the Squire's gardens in the broiling

glare of the scorching sun without any covering over her head, no mortal ever saw a freckle on her face.

After making Mr. Kinsman known to the young people, Mrs. Porchester, having sacrificed herself for half an hour for his benefit, went off to sacrifice herself at Palgrave Priory for the good of the dowager Lady Tunstall, and left the clergyman chatting with Ada and her brother.

"May I look at your work?" Mr. Kinsman asked of Ada.

"Pray do so," answered the young lady, who had risen from her sketching-stool to shake hands with the visitor. "It is ready for inspection. The sketch is finished—at least, I know that I can do no more for it, for I am beginning to despise it."

"Is that a proof that you have completed it, and done your best?"

"Yes. At the outset of a new drawing, I always feel that I am going to produce an excellent thing. Whilst I am at work upon it, I am on the best possible terms with myself, and

feel myself almost worthy to be named with David Cox or Mr. Holland. When I have done, my excitement passes away, and I see all the faults of a raw, feeble performance."

"I have felt all that myself," replied Mr. Kinsman, smiling at the girl's description of experiences more frequently undergone by able artists than mere amateurs.

"You are an artist, then?"

"I wish I were one. The title of 'intelligent amateur' is all that I can lay claim to."

"I am an amateur without the intelligence," returned Ada. "But it makes me happy to try to do things well, and it does me good to learn by experience that satisfactory results are beyond my power."

"But this performance is neither raw nor feeble, Miss Clissold. It reminds me of a sketch that I saw last year at the Old Water-Colour Exhibition."

"You are very good to encourage and cheer me, now that I need consolation," Ada replied, with a little merry laugh.

"You have clearly been taught by a good master," continued Mr. Kinsman.

"I have had that advantage. No girl can have a better teacher than Mr. Truelock; but since he has been in Norway, I have been shamefully idle."

"Truelock!—is he related to Mr. Noel Truelock, the Associate of the Royal Academy?"

"He is Mr. Noel Truelock himself."

Mr. Kinsman was surprised. Then Mr. Truelock resided in the neighbourhood of Sunningwold.

With a smile on her face, that seemed likely to be the prelude of a laugh, Ada observed—
"Sunningwold is not altogether outside the bounds of civilization, Mr. Kinsman. We are rustics, but civilized rustics. Moreover, our scenery is of itself enough to account for the taste of the painter who likes to live amongst us."

The clergyman agreed with Ada. The landscapes of the surrounding country were very lovely, in some instances almost grand.

"Moreover," continued the young lady, "Mr.

Truelock is one of our clan. If you run round half-a-dozen genealogical corners, and leap over some hundred years of the past, you may alight upon the proof that Noel Truelock, A.R.A., is my distant cousin—very distant.”

“Indeed!—and he lives in Sunningwold?”

“No, at Bridgeham. His place is Bridgeham Rookery. But just now he is fishing in Norway. He will, however, return to us next week.”

“Why has he been so idle during the last three years? They complain in London that he has almost abandoned his profession.”

A look of sadness came over Ada's sunny face, and a sorrowful light was observable in her violet eyes, as she answered, “Don't you know? Poor Mrs. Truelock died three years since, and her death robbed him of the motive for industry, almost robbed him of all delight in art. He is very much to be pitied.”

Felix Kinsman's dark eyes showed Ada that her words had been spoken to a sympathetic auditor.

“It is the fashion of people who have never

known sorrow to talk as though man's higher pursuits were sure sources of consolation in moments of affliction. They are sadly mistaken. The worst of sorrow is that it steals from the intellect all its subtler energies, and, whilst it blunts the finest perceptions of the mind, renders former pleasures absolutely repulsive."

"That is the case with Mr. Truelock. His best works were done under the very eyes of his wife, who used to sit in his studio and read to him while he worked. He believes himself indebted to her for his noblest conceptions. Every object in his studio recalls her so painfully to him that he cannot work hopefully and thoroughly."

"Has he children?"

"Two little girls—Isa and Trottie, the elder of them only four years old."

"Poor man! For the world's sake, no less than for his own, I hope that time will bring him the will and the power to resume his labours."

"You know," responded Ada, growing charmingly confidential, as she prefaced her

next speech with a scarcely defensible 'You know,' "I think he will soon set to work again. He is certainly much better and cheerier. Last season he hunted regularly three times a week. He is a superb horseman—the best rider in the county; and everyone saw that his days with the fox-hounds did him good. His Norwegian trip will set him up; and I hope that he will soon make a fresh start in life, and win the fame he deserves."

"You desire fame for him, then?"

"Of course," Ada responded with comical decisiveness. "*All* men should be famous—that is to say, if God has given them the power to win fame."

"And how about clever women?"

"They should be content to live in the glory of their famous husbands."

Turning his face to Jemmy, who, continuing to sit on his rug, had listened to his companions' conversation in silence, Mr. Kinsman observed, "So you have been reading to your sister? What is the book?"

"One of Cooper's novels, sir?" Jemmy an-

swered, using the respectful title which—heir of Sunningwold though he was—he had been taught to apply to his masculine superiors.

“Your father told me that you liked novels. I like them also. I maintain that they are a noble part of our literature. What novelists have you read?”

“Scott, Dickens, Lever, Lytton, Thackeray, Miss Muloch,” Jemmy answered. “I must have read many hundreds of novels. I wish I knew the wonderful people who write them. I think Mr. Thackeray would be very kind to me. The wounded giant would be gentle to the wounded dwarf. But of all stories I like best novels of action, in which fellows ride run-away horses over precipices and bring themselves safely through scores of perils by quick wit and prodigious strength. Did you ever read any of Frank Smedley’s tales, Mr. Kinsman?”

Mr. Kinsman had read them all and thought them excellent.

“Mr. Noel Truelock knew poor Frank Smedley well, and has told me all about him.

Frank was one of my kind, a cripple, better off a deal in intellect than I am, but far worse off in body. A year or so hence I shall, perhaps, lay aside what papa calls my steel thingummies, and be much like other men. But poor Frank had scarcely a straight or rightly fashioned bone in his body, with the exception of the bones of his large, clever brain-pan. From infancy to the last he was always wheeled about, and had to be fed by his servants. Well, when I was quite a little fellow, and read 'Frank Fairleigh' for the first time, and was mad with delight about it, Mr. Truelock told Frank Smedley about me, and how I was never allowed to leave my couch. And Frank wrote me a letter—such a letter—telling me how to make the best of my hard lot. 'Dear Jemmy,' the letter began. 'We are brothers in affliction; and though I have never seen you I love you like a brother.' You won't read that letter without crying, Mr. Kinsman, when I show it to you."

"I am sure I shan't, Jemmy," the clergyman answered, "for you have brought the tears into my eyes by talking about it."

After a pause, Mr. Kinsman observed, "I suppose that you are better up in English prose fiction than in Latin grammar?"

Admitting that to be the case, Jemmy gave a brief sketch of his scholastic acquirements, carefully refraining from expressions that could lead Mr. Kinsman to over-estimate them. He knew a little Latin, acquired chiefly from Ada's late governess, who had taken her departure; a little Euclid, learnt under the same feminine teacher; but no Greek; and of arithmetic very little beyond the primary rules. Now that he was growing stronger, Jemmy wished to push forward with his hitherto neglected studies; for *if*—the boy laid a significant emphasis on the *if*—he grew to be a man, he should like to be the intellectual equal of college-trained English gentlemen.

Having heard this account of Jemmy's intellectual condition and aims, Mr. Kinsman showed signs of an intention to bid the brother and sister farewell; but the young people declined to part with him so soon. They would see him off the premises. Ada had finished her

sketch; Jemmy had been out of doors quite long enough: If Mr. Kinsman would not object to walking at her brother's slow pace, Ada would attend him to the roadward gate.

As she spoke, the girl held out both her hands to Jemmy, who was about to grasp them, when Mr. Kinsman, discerning the young lady's purpose, offered his stronger arms to the lame boy.

Taking one of his sister's and one of the clergyman's hands, Jemmy allowed them to pull him upwards.

"Thank you," the boy said, when he had regained his feet; "two friends are better than one. But Ada is a rare friend, Mr. Kinsman. Mine will be a bad case when she marries and deserts me."

If this speech brought a blush to his sister's face, the boy did not discern it; for, ere it was uttered, Ada had taken up a position some two feet in advance of the speaker, and with her back towards him.

"Now, Jemmy, 'walking-stick' is ready. Lean firmly on stick, and come on."

Whereupon Jemmy put his right arm over Ada's shoulders, and, leaning upon her, slowly retraced his steps to the Hall.

At the door of the mansion, Mr. Kinsman separated himself from them, although Ada pressed him to enter the house, and look at the specimens of Noel Truelock's art that adorned the walls of the drawing-room. Miss Clissold would excuse him if he deferred till another day the pleasure of looking at the pictures, as it was incumbent on him to return to the Parsonage without any further delay.

When Ada had led Jemmy to the drawing-room, and placed him on a sofa at one of the windows, the boy asked, "How do you like him?"

"Very much," was the answer.

"Didn't you see how the tears came into his eyes at the thought of poor Frank Smedley?"

"I saw them, dear."

"He can feel for a poor fellow burdened with such a weak, unstable, rickety body as mine."

"If he won't consent spontaneously to be

your tutor, Jemmy, I'll have recourse to compulsion, and force him to consent."

"How will you force him?"

"I'll go down on my knees and beg him."

Jemmy smiled at the thought of so terrible a kind of compulsion. Had he been an ordinary thirteen years old schoolboy, he would have called his sister a brick for promising to put the screw on the awfully jolly clergyman. As it was, he caught hold of Ada's glistening gold hair, and having drawn her face down to his lips, kissed it as he said, "You are very kind, Ada, to promise to help me."

Meanwhile, as he walked leisurely down the hill to his new home, Mr. Kinsman thought to himself, "The people at the Hall will prove agreeable neighbours. Mrs. Porchester is a most entertaining study; I'll be bound she makes self-sacrifice a paying concern; and if I read her countenance correctly, she does not allow Ann Dawson to cheat her of a single egg. Miss Ada is brilliant, piquant, exquisite—a little gem of girlish elegance and womanly dignity. She will be the second Mrs. Noel True-

lock. If she isn't in love with Truelock now, she will be soon. The boy is a piece of fine clay, badly wrought; he will soon be able to do what he likes with me. And the Squire—what a dear, simple, benevolent old child he is! Heigho! How the father and his children remind me of a father and son and daughter whom I knew years since in Canada!”

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CHAPTER IV.

JEMMY CLISSOLD AND THE REVEREND FELIX
KINSMAN COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING.

ADA was not required to put into execution her terrible purpose of compelling Mr. Kinsman to comply with her father's proposal, and accept the office of tutor to her brother. For before the crisis could arrive, which would have brought her to her knees at the feet of the astonished clergyman, Jemmy and Mr. Kinsman had an interview that rendered Ada's intercession unnecessary.

It was in the middle of the third week of his residence at Sunningwold, when he had made acquaintance with his parishioners, and accomplished the work of furnishing and settling down in his new home, that the Reverend Felix Kins-

man, after paying several visits to the Hall, and establishing cordial relations with its principal inmates, came upon Jemmy in a quiet corner of the Squire's garden, where the boy was reclining on one of his couches, and thinking about a novel which he had just read.

"Papa has walked out to the home-farm, and Mrs. Porchester is at the hennery, but Ada is in the drawing-room," said Jemmy, whose modesty precluded him from imagining that to speak with him was the chief object of the clergyman's visit.

"And I'll be bound, Jemmy," answered Mr. Kinsman, approaching the invalid's carriage, and deliberately seating himself on the grass near its wheels whilst he spoke, "that they are all very pleasantly occupied. Mr. Clissold is admiring his big cattle, Mrs. Porchester is throwing handfuls of grain to her chickens and pigeons, and your sister is at the piano, overcoming the difficulties of some new composition. In the meantime I will sit down here, and have a chat with you till luncheon."

"But don't sit on the grass, sir," rejoined

Jemmy, taking a whistle from his waistcoat-pocket, whilst his eyes manifested the delight which the visitor's words occasioned him. "I'll sound my whistle, and tell some one to bring you a chair."

"No, no, put that shrill, screeching contrivance back again into your pocket. If you sound it, the noise will bring some one whom we would rather have at a distance for a few minutes. It might reach your sister's ear, disturb her, and bring her running out to us."

"And that would not be a stupendous calamity."

"No, but it would be a small mishap, or, to speak more courteously, a trifling disarrangement of my plans; for I want a little talk with you."

The blood rose to Jemmy's usually pallid face, and from the enlarging pupils of his eyes there came a light of triumph and exultation and gratitude as he exclaimed, "Thank you, thank you, sir. I know what you've come to tell me. You are going to promise to tutorize me. I know you are, Mr. Kinsman, by the way

in which you are trying not to laugh."

"You have spared me the trouble of putting a question," the clergyman answered, "and you are not entirely wrong, Master Jemmy. I was going to ask you if you would like to have me for a tutor. I should not like to have an unwilling pupil on my hands."

"Like it! Why, Ada and I have talked of the matter a score of times, and she has threatened to do the most awful things to you if you refused papa's solicitation."

"Indeed! Did she threaten to report me unfavourably to Mr. Noel Truelock, or to make Mrs. Porchester cut me off the free-list for eggs from the hennery?"

"Worse than that, sir—much worse! She threatened to go down on her knees to you, and compel you."

"And even so she would have failed to subdue if I had come to the conclusion that you required a more scholarly man for your tutor than I am."

"I require! Ada says that you are wonderfully clever."

"She is very complimentary, and not altogether wrong. I am a clever fellow up to a certain mark; and I have read a good deal, and know how to make use of my knowledge. But a man may be cleverish, and fairly informed—very learned in comparison with such a boy as you—and yet by no means well qualified to coach a youngster in classics and mathematics. In the technical sense of the term I am no scholar, and my knowledge of mathematics is altogether rudimentary. But for the next two or three years you will be all right in my hands. I am as well qualified as any senior wrangler or Oxford first-classman to teach you for that time. And I will teach you on one condition—on one condition, which you must promise me to observe honourably."

"What is it, Mr. Kinsman?"

"That, should I ever say to you, 'Now, Jemmy, I have done all I can for you, and the work must be carried onwards by a better man,' you won't oppose me, or entreat me to continue to be your tutor. Promise me that, and I will promise to teach you."

"I promise," said the boy, slowly and solemnly, "never to dissuade you from doing what you feel to be your duty ; and should you, sir, ever feel that duty requires you to cease teaching me, I won't ask you to continue to be my tutor. But, sir, you will *always* be my friend ?" he added quickly. "Should the time ever come for me to be taught by some one else, you'll be my friend all the same ?"

Touched by the earnestness of this abrupt and affectionate appeal, Felix Kinsman answered—"Yes, my dear boy, from my heart I promise to be your true and loving friend from this time forth—here's my hand upon it."

Whereupon the clergyman, whose seat upon the grass was scarcely six inches lower than the wheeled couch in which his companion lay, stretched forth the hand, which Jemmy, obeying an impulse of gratitude and devotion, grasped and pressed to his lips.

"And I'll begin by being your watchful and assiduous teacher. I will take much pains with you."

"Thank you, Mr. Kinsman ; and I will do everything in my power to please you."

After a pause, during which Felix Kinsman saw the light and air of joyful excitement and gratitude disappear from his companion's face, and give way to a look of gentle and deeply impressive sadness, Jemmy remarked, with pathetic seriousness—

"But I may not deceive you, sir. All your pains and trouble will be in vain—all your trouble will be of no use. It would not be honest in me to hide that from you, when I am asking you to expend labour upon me."

For a few moments Mr. Kinsman failed to see the force of these singular words. No pains given to the mental training of so clever a lad were likely to be rendered ineffectual by any natural defect of his intellect. Nor was it credible that the boy's tutor would encounter insuperable obstacles in Jemmy's moral nature. What could he mean?

"Papa won't see that I am delicate and a cripple. He believes, or tries to believe," the boy said, looking steadily into his tutor's eyes, "that my weakness is a thing of the past, and that I shall soon throw aside my 'steel thing-

ummies,' as he calls them, and be able to do as much with these poor rickety legs as other boys, who have all their bodily powers, do with their limbs in the playgrounds of Eton and Harrow. Papa is a very good and honourable man, exactly truthful to all the world besides himself, but his affection for me compels him to deceive himself; and, knowing how it would cut him to the heart to see me as I see myself, I am very careful to make light of my sufferings to him, and to pretend that I am growing stronger, when God is whispering to me that I am only growing to the state when I shall fall away suddenly from this life into His arms. I hope, Mr. Kinsman, it is not wrong of me to deceive papa in this respect. Indeed, I am quite truthful to him in every other matter; and I would not help him to deceive himself about me, were it not that I love him so very much."

Jemmy paused, after concluding the last sentence in a voice which implied his strong desire that the clergyman would in some degree sanction his untruthfulness.

Profoundly touched by the fortitude, and considerateness, and conscientiousness of the boy, who, whilst bravely concealing his sufferings and mournful prevision of their end from his parent, was troubled with a doubt whether he was justified even for so unselfish and dutiful an end in using falsehood, Felix Kinsman said, "No, Jemmy; having regard to the motive and spirit of your conduct, I can't say that you are wrong. You are only doing to your father as you would wish him to do to you, if you were like him and in his place, and he like you and in your place. I don't say that you are taking the only right course, but I think that your line of conduct is justifiable, and very creditable to you."

"I never deceive myself," Jemmy continued—"I couldn't even if I tried to do so. I know well how it will go with me a year or two years hence, or, at most, three or four years hence. But it will please papa to see me reading fewer novels, and working regularly at the studies by which English boys are trained into being gentlemen. When he sees me working

away at what will never be of any use to me in this world, he will be happy about me, and more hopeful for me than ever. But it would be wrong of me to deceive you into thinking that your pains will achieve the object which papa hopes they will achieve. I shall never live to be a man. And perhaps I ought not to ask you, sir, to spend on me the labour which would do more good to the world if it were spent on a boy who would, in the ordinary course of things, grow to be a man."

"You needn't trouble yourself on that point, Jemmy," the young clergyman rejoined, feeling as he spoke that he would learn as much from the boy in one way as ever the boy would learn from him in another. "It is my duty to regard you as a boy who may live to be a man—who will certainly live to be more than a man. Perhaps your serious (I don't say melancholy) view of your own case will be falsified by the event, and may turn out to be nothing more than a mental consequence of your not incurable bodily weakness. But even though it could be now proved to be a true

view, you would not be justified in neglecting to cultivate your talents."

"My one talent, sir, my one talent," interposed Jemmy, correcting, and at the same time agreeing with, his friend—"my one talent is a fair amount of intellect. And what you say about my obligation to cultivate it is what I feel very strongly. God may have some need of that one talent in Heaven—it is not mine, but His; I am only the steward of it. And if I were to neglect to cultivate it, because it is only one talent, and a talent not likely to be of much service to me in this world, I should be wicked."

"You see your duty so clearly on that point it is needless for me to try to make it clearer to you."

"And you think that you would be justified in giving up to me the time which a tutor must give up to a pupil?"

Mr. Kinsman smiled as he answered, "My conscience is quite easy on that point. And now, Jemmy, as we have had our little talk, take out your whistle and blow a servant

this way, who may announce me in the drawing-room. Most likely Mrs. Porchester has returned from the hennery by this time. Anyhow, I may not steal in and away again without trying to see her."

"I won't call a servant," the heir of Sunningwold answered. "I'll blow Ada this way. She will be so glad to hear of your goodness. Her signal is three sharp whistles."

Almost as he spoke, the three shrill screams passed from the boy's whistle through the open windows of the drawing-room to Ada, who lost no time in responding to the summons.

In another half minute the young lady was seen tripping, bare-headed, and without the protection of a parasol, over the sunny sward of the well-kept lawn.

"It's all right, Ada!" the boy exclaimed exultingly as Ada drew near his couch. "He has promised to be my tutor. Help me to thank him."

"Bravo!" ejaculated the girl, nodding her head in a way that seemed to shake drops of light from her glistening gold hair. "I knew

that this would be a lucky day for us. My dear Mr. Kinsman, Jemmy and I are your debtors."

"If Jemmy wishes to be more than duly grateful to me," returned Mr. Kinsman, "for undertaking a very pleasant office, I must let him please himself. But I may not allow you to place me in a position to which I have no title, Miss Clissold. When you shall allow me to do *you* a service, you will make *me* your debtor by allowing me to serve you."

Extending her right hand composedly to the clergyman, who had sprung from a recumbent posture on the grass to his feet on the girl's approach, Ada said with a peculiar decisiveness and emphasis which compelled Mr. Kinsman to accept her thanks, "Indeed, sir, you are wrong. Everyone who is good to Jemmy makes me his debtor, and a very grateful debtor too. I hope that my gratitude does not make you regret your kindness to my brother."

When she had thus carried her point with Mr. Kinsman, and shaken him heartily by the hand, she asked Jemmy, "How did you conquer him?"

"He told me that you meant to go on your knees to me, Miss Clissold," the young clergyman said laughingly, "if I proved stubborn. I could not resist, after hearing that such a punishment was in store for me."

Curtseying prettily to the tutor, Miss Ada said, "You would not have suffered much from the execution of my awful purpose. I can kneel very gracefully, and rise without assistance." And then, turning round upon her brother, she pretended to scold him for gossiping about her, and repeating words which she had spoken in strict confidence.

Whereupon Jemmy, after laughing heartily, assured her that Mr. Kinsman had promised spontaneously to be his tutor, and had not heard of her compulsory intentions until he had made up his mind to yield to less violent pressure.

"Any how, you are a lucky boy," Ada urged; "and for my sake you must be wonderfully good, and never get into disgrace."

"For your sake?" inquired Mr. Kinsman.

"Yes," responded Ada, with one of her

merriest looks, "Jemmy is my prince, and I am his humble companion; and when Prince James is naughty he is to be corrected by seeing me punished. Jemmy and I have settled that. You will set me terrible long impositions—imposses, as schoolboys call them—whenever Jemmy behaves improperly."

Before Mr. Kinsman had time to assure Ada that he would steadily and vigorously carry out her plan for Jemmy's mental and moral welfare, the bell announced that luncheon was ready.

"Come on, Prince James," cried Ada cheerily. "Will you get up and lean on 'stick,' or shall Mr. Kinsman and I pull you across the garden in triumph?"

Prince James would get upon his feet and lean on his trusty "stick!"

Whereupon "stick," after helping Jemmy to his feet, took up a position in regular style, and forthwith the three friends moved towards the red walls of the Hall.

"One of our friends, who wishes to see you as much as you wish to see him, Mr. Kinsman," said Ada, as she walked over the lawn with

short, firm steps, under her familiar burden, "has arrived, and will lunch with us. Mr. True-lock came in with papa from the farm, half a minute before Jemmy whistled for me. Norway has done him a vast amount of good. He is as brown as a berry, and as noisy as a schoolboy."

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CHAPTER V.

NOEL TRUELOCK, A.R.A.

THERE are berries and berries—schoolboys and schoolboys. Noel Truelock's brownness was not that of a roasted coffee-berry or a dark bean. If he was as noisy as a schoolboy, the schoolboy whom he resembled was not of an uproarious sort.

To Felix Kinsman the artist appeared an unusually well-looking and gentlemanlike person, much less foppish and theatrical in style than the clergyman had expected to find the original of certain *cartes de visite* which he had seen in the shop-windows of London photographers.

A man, some two inches taller than the average height of Englishmen, and remarkable for

piercing dark eyes, strongly aquiline profile, and a long silken black beard, Noel Truelock was deemed a very comely fellow by his brother artists, and an extraordinarily handsome one by the ladies of London drawing-rooms. His curling black hair ran out beyond his high, straightly-rising forehead in a ledge-like ridge; the thick glossy hair of his prominent eyebrows were black shelves covering his embarrassingly keen eyes; and the raven darkness of the hair on his lips and chin contrasted strongly with the whiteness of the teeth, which, without being conspicuously large or unduly prominent, were visible when he laughed or spoke with animation. Usually his complexion was pale, if not unhealthily pallid; but exposure in Norway had slightly bronzed his cheeks, and faintly embrowned the skin of his usually white forehead. His figure was elegant, almost effeminately delicate, and yet not devoid of indications of an abundance of muscular force. He missed a little of being that social annoyance, an obtrusively handsome man. He missed much of being that far more offensive creature, a

pretty man. And yet his detractors, who designated him sneeringly "Beauty Truelock," had some grounds for their assertion that he was too good-looking and daintily made for a man. But the detractors were altogether at fault when they charged him with priding himself unduly on his black beard, and incessantly thinking about his good looks. Notwithstanding the artificiality of his appearance, the world never produced a more simple and thoroughly unaffected gentleman than Noel Truelock.

In the studios he had many admirers, and but few jealous rivals. The most cantankerous and perverse of disappointed aspirants for artistic celebrity admitted that he deserved his success. The few who envied him his notoriety and influence said nothing worse of him than that he was exceedingly vain, and so indolent that he would never do justice to great powers. Though it was calculated to conciliate rather than irritate his professional competitors, his late neglect of his vocation caused him to be misunderstood and misrepresented by some of his censors, especially by Mr. Costeker Ferret, art-critic of

The Free Speaker, who was continually taunting him with his shameful indolence, and giving him excellent advice, in very faulty English, respecting his duties to society in general, and art in particular. If Costeker Ferret—a worthy fellow, though his censorious labours for the good of mankind leave him no leisure for the proper care of his own liver—had known how thoroughly Noel Truelock enjoyed his disapprobation, I am disposed to think he would not so often have called attention to “the once promising draughtsman” and “brilliant drone” whom he vainly strove to rouse to a proper sense of his responsibilities.

Mr. Ferret was not the only person whom Noel’s conduct puzzled and exasperated. Indeed, though “the once-promising draughtsman” and “brilliant drone” had a large army of London acquaintances with whom he was highly popular, he had scarcely a friend outside the secluded set of his Sunningwold neighbours to whom he cared to reveal how cruelly his wife’s death had affected him,—how completely it had robbed him of the mental calmness and energies

especially requisite, to a man of his sensibility, for the prosecution of labour in art. His acquaintances knew that he had been an enthusiastic student, and throughout several years an extraordinarily prolific producer of works no less remarkable for their indications of conscientious industry in respect of details and "finish" than for vigorous thought and masterly design. How then was it to be explained that, immediately after winning his Associateship and gaining the almost unanimous plaudits of society, he had for three entire years been so criminally idle that the Academy's Exhibition for 1866 was the third of the Academy's Exhibitions in which the strongest of the younger associates was not represented by even a sketch or study? Of course, everyone knew of Mrs. Truelock's death; but, as everyone justly remarked, if Truelock did not like being a widower, he could easily buy another wife. There was a redundant supply of marriageable women in the market, from whom such a man might "take his pick." The prevailing notion was that fashion had lured the painter from his

proper pursuit, that he was fully and congenially engaged in dancing attendance on duchesses, that he had neither time nor heart for the concerns of his noble vocation.

This was Ferret's view of the offender's case; and Mr. Costeker Ferret proclaimed it incessantly to his particular admirers,—for even Costeker has his admirers—who believe in his critical faculty, whilst they consume the mutton-chops and whisky-and-water which the hospitable little fellow dispenses with commendable liberality in his second-floor lodgings in a Brompton bye-street. "This kind of thing," Ferret observed hotly, "is not to be endured any longer. Truelock has not time to work, like an honest man, but he can toady swells; he was at the Duchess of Dandergriffin's dinner-party last week and the Marchioness of Alderton's ball. The 'Post' is continually announcing him as staying at this 'house' and that 'castle.' The fact is, sir, he has degenerated into mere trencher-man and hanger-on of a few aristocratic personages. If he meant that sort of thing, why did he push himself into that associateship, which might

have been filled by a resolute worker? But I'll rouse him, sir. *The Free Speaker* will be true to its title. I'll rouse him." And without needless delay, Mr. Ferret produced those three remarkable essays—entitled respectively, "The Artist's Endowments," "The Artist's Reward," and "The Obligations of the Artist," which Noel Truelock read with keen amusement on his way from the English coast to Christiania. The articles roused Noel to say benevolently, "The little fellow is such good fun that really I wish the Prime Minister would give him a pension."

It was an almost jovial luncheon; Jemmy was so delighted at having "caught his tutor," and the Squire so hilarious over the result of his overtures to Mr. Kinsman. For that result Mr. Clissold took infinite credit to himself. He had, as he explained to Noel Truelock in a loud voice, been looking out for the right man for several months, and now that he had found and fixed him, Jemmy would run through the classics and mathematics in no time. Filling an additional glass of brown sherry (Hardy's

regular allowance of sherry at luncheon was two large glassfuls), the Squire insisted that Noel and Felix Kinsman should join him in drinking success to Jemmy's studies, a toast which afforded the artist an opportunity to make a little jocular speech about the intellectual characteristics of the young people, and to speak of Mr. Kinsman as his fellow-worker in the educational interests of Sunningwold Hall.

"Ada is my pupil, Jemmy yours," the painter remarked to the curate; "and I may congratulate you on having by far the more promising pupil. Ada has ability, and might do well; but she is fearfully indolent, and unfortunately her evil propensities are not counteracted by articles in *The Free Speaker*. When Mr. Ferret has completed my reformation, I mean to ask him to take her in hand. Through want of seasonable counsel and firm government, she is growing to be a most reprehensible character. She is, moreover, extremely impudent, and thinks that she has worked up to the extreme limits of the capabilities of water-colour art."

"I don't think that," observed Ada, putting out "a feeler" for the entertainment of a purpose which, she feared, might not meet with the unqualified approval of her papa and Mrs. Porchester, "but I mean to try my hand at oils."

"What!" cried the Squire. "Do you want to make my house smell like a coach-builder's shop?"

"No, papa,—the smell of the paints won't annoy anyone, if I have a studio at the top of the house."

"Have you put Miss Minx up to this project?" inquired the Squire, turning towards Ada's art-teacher.

Noel Truelock laughed. "Is she such an exemplary daughter that you think her incapable of mischief save at my suggestion?"

"You and she are always plotting some mischief," said Hardy, shaking his head with an affectation of ill-humour.

"Anyhow, sir," Noel observed, "I should advise you to let her have her own way."

"But oil paints *do* smell disagreeably," urged

Mrs. Porchester, seizing an opportunity for self-sacrifice ; "and they are not nearly so clean as water-colours."

Mr. Truelock was of opinion that oil paints were clean and savoury things when they were carefully used. Mr. Kinsman rather liked the smell of them. Experience of the studio at Bridgeham Rookery justified Jemmy in thinking their odour decidedly pleasant.

The Squire looked to Mrs. Porchester for a decision, when that lady, with characteristic amiability, declared in favour of Ada's scheme. Speaking for herself, Mrs. Porchester admitted that she disliked the smell of oil-paints, but she was only too glad to put her nose and nerves out of consideration when called upon to decide on any question affecting her darling girl's happiness. Ada had better take the little drawing-room for a studio.

Whilst Mrs. Porchester was settling the question thus amiably, the Squire looked round the luncheon-table with a face radiant with delightful enthusiasm ; and, as he looked successively at each of his two guests and two children, he

raised both his sets of outstretched fingers six inches above the table, and gave the object of his scrutiny a look and a tremendous nod of the head, that implied, "Just listen—did you ever meet the like of that woman before? She is a perfect phenomenon of self-sacrifice!"

When Mrs. Porchester had concluded her gracious assent, the Squire brought his right palm flat down on the table with a bang, and exclaimed, "By Jupiter, Maria, you are always sacrificing yourself! 'Pon my honour, I do believe that to make anyone happy you'd give yourself away."

Which speech brought to Maria's face a scarcely-perceptible blush, that disappeared ere she had said, "Dear Hardy, your kindness causes you to make too much of a trifle. If I do find pleasure in self-sacrifice, you mayn't praise me for it, but my training in childhood."

"No doubt, no doubt," the Squire assented, severely and piously. "'Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he'll flourish like the green bay-tree.' You remember the scripture, Mr. Kinsman?"

Covering Mr. Kinsman's slight embarrassment, and withdrawing attention from Mrs. Porches-ter's ruling virtue, Ada exclaimed, "That's capital, Mr. Truelock! Will you bring my new box of oil-paints, and the easel, and canvas over to-morrow? or shall I drive over to the Rookery this afternoon, and bring them back myself?"

"You saucy little baggage!" the Squire vociferated, "have you bought all the nasty things before you had my leave to use them?"

Whereupon Ada rose from her seat, and running to her papa, gave him one of those filial caresses, a good specimen of which (as Hardy Clissold often admitted) would reconcile him to the loss of all his eye-teeth, if the petted girl wished to extract them.

"Mr. Truelock brought them from town," the young lady explained to the Squire, as she stood over him, and chattered into his laughing face, "at my request. There was no need, you know, for me to get your leave first. I knew that I could get your permission at any moment."

As the party moved away from the luncheon-

table, and Felix Kinsman was preparing to take leave of his friends, on the plea of clerical duty, Noel Truelock put his right hand lightly on the clergyman's shoulder, and said, "We are near neighbours, Mr. Kinsman; I hope we shall be good friends. I left my card this morning at the Parsonage. Come and see me at Bridgeham Rookery. Ada tells me that you are an artist; and perhaps my studio contains something that you will like to see."

When the Reverend Felix Kinsman had accepted this hearty invitation with corresponding cordiality, Noel Truelock added, "Don't stand on formalities with me. If I am not at home when you call, don't turn away, but walk in, if the servants say that I shall return soon. I shall give orders that, if you call when I am absent for a short time, you are to be shown into the dining-room, supplied with newspapers, and made comfortable. If the papers don't amuse you, ring the bell, and order the nurse to bring down Isa and Trottie. You can't be dull with two such companions."

From the manner, no less than the words, in

which the artist made his friendly overtures to the clergyman, Ada Clissold thought that her teacher and Jemmy's tutor would soon grow to be fast friends; for it was Ada's opinion that every one for whom Noel Truelock evinced a liking must necessarily like him.

Certainly the young lady was not wrong in thinking that one of the two men was most strongly disposed to form a close alliance with the other.

Towards the close of the long summer's day, as he sauntered slowly homewards in the deepening twilight from Sunningwold Hall by a foot-path across the meadows and fields, Noel Truelock thought to himself—"I like Jemmy's tutor. I scarcely know why I take to him, but I like him very much. He is uncommonly well-looking for a Levite, and he has an intellect above the average mental standard of parsondom. Ada, whose little head contains the wits of a dozen ordinary men, says that he preaches excellent sermons, and knows how to gossip with the village folk without seeming to be condescending to their inferiority. Jemmy's instinctive

affection for him is in his favour. He knows something about art—another fact in his favour. His manner to me was very pleasant—respectful, no doubt, but quite innocent of the odious, staring, eye-fawning flattery with which I am treated by noodles, who pay court to me as a social lion. We shall pull well together. Sunningwold Vicarage and Bridg-ham Rookery will coalesce. His face is a noble face, though rather too effeminate for a man; and there is something in it which tells me that, like me, he has been hard hit by grief. And the man's voice is a grand voice. Jemmy is right—it is like church-music. A very peculiar voice! It is manly, and yet has a quality that corresponds with the womanly sweetness of his smile."

CHAPTER VI.

NOEL TRUELOCK RECEIVES A VISITOR AND DIS-
MISSES A PREPOSTEROUS NOTION.

WHEN the Reverend Felix Kinsman, after an interval of two days, returned Noel Truelock's call, he found that gentleman away from home, and, on learning that the artist would probably return in the course of an hour, he acted on the directions which he had received from the master of Bridgeham Rookery. After spending half an hour in loitering about the garden of the Rookery, and surveying the forty acres of undulating, park-like ground that surrounded the modest shooting-box, he entered the house, and asked to be introduced to Isa and Trottie—a request speedily followed by the appearance of the two girls and their nurse in

the dining-room, where the clergyman had seated himself in an arm-chair near an open window, and directly opposite the painting, which the stranger presumed to be a portrait of the late Mrs. Truelock, executed by her husband.

Though she had spent all the days of her brief existence at Bridgeham, Miss Isa was entirely free from the shyness of rustic children. No minute maiden, on the eve of her sixth year, was ever more completely mistress of herself and a social position than Isa, as she preceded her nurse and Trottie, and walking boldly over the dining-room carpet came straight up to the clergyman.

"Papa said you would come," said the young lady.

"And I have come, Isa."

"And he told me to behave nicely, and so I will."

"Of course you will."

"I am not a bit afraid of you."

"You would not be so silly."

"I am not afraid of you," rejoined Isa in an

explanatory tone, "because papa says you are a nice man, and very kind to children."

"So I am to good children. And is that your little sister with nurse?"

"Yes; but you mayn't talk to her, or look at her much—not yet."

"Why not?"

"Because she is afraid of you. I am not a bit. Trottie is a little thing, only three, and not four. I am almost five. That's a good age."

"A very good age."

"And Trottie will be almost five by-and-by."

"I hope so."

After scanning her visitor curiously for nearly a minute, Isa was pleased to remark—"You haven't a black beard like my papa, and yet your hair is black. Why don't you have a beard?"

"I keep a smooth soft face, so that little girls may like to kiss me. Will you kiss me?"

"Yes, and you may kiss me too," said Isa,

extending her neck, and turning her small, round, dark-eyed face upwards.

"Thank you."

When the kisses had been exchanged, Isa was pleased to remark, "Your face is like a lady's. You ought to have a black beard, like *my* papa."

"I thought little girls did not like beards, which are rough things."

Whereat Isa's face brimmed over with merriment, and she fell into a fit of silvery laughter.

"Rough! Why, beards are soft as pussies," she declared, on recovering from her amusement. "My papa's beard is as soft as silk, and all warm like my pussycat."

"Indeed. I thought beards always scrubbed little girl's faces."

"No, they don't," urged Isa, rolling away into more laughter, that ended in time for her to add, "And girl's faces aren't scrubbed. Bricks and floors are scrubbed."

"True. I forgot that."

"Ask my papa to get you a beard. You should have one."

When Felix Kinsman had, with every proper

appearance of seriousness, assured Isa that he would carry out her suggestion, and commission her papa to buy him a beard, Isa, after glancing at her little sister, remarked, "Trottie won't be afraid of you much longer."

"Indeed. I am glad of that."

"Don't look at her, or you may frighten her. She is a tiny thing, and quite young."

"I won't look at her. But what is she doing?"

"She has left nurse's side, and walked all by herself up to the table." Lowering her voice to a confidential whisper, Isa added, "If you don't look she will come quite up to us. Isn't she a dear tiny?—and very young?"

Scarcely had Mr. Kinsman time to assure Isa, in a low tone, that he appreciated the minuteness and obvious youthfulness of Trottie, when that young lady staggered up to the clergyman, with the peculiar gait to which she was indebted for the familiar appellation, that had altogether superseded the name given her by her Godfather and Godmothers.

Said Trottie bluntly, stretching forth her fat little paws, "You kiss Isa—you kiss me," or

rather the infant uttered words which would have been the foregoing, had her command of the sibilants been perfect.

Isa was triumphant; the exultation visible in her radiant countenance saying distinctly, "I told you so! I knew what she would be up to! There's no one who knows so much about my tiny sister as I do!"

"Of course, Trottie—you shall be kissed," responded Mr. Kinsman, who, for the proper execution of the promise, "made a lap," lifted Trottie from the ground, and brought her under the cover of his left arm.

"Kiss me again—I love oo," Trottie implored, when she had received the first of a series of kisses which Felix Kinsman gave the child's face.

Affairs had reached this satisfactory state of mutual friendliness, and Isa was congratulating herself on Trottie's exemplary demeanour, when the clergyman and the two children became aware of the presence of Noel Truelock, who had entered the room so noiselessly that no one of the three was aware of his arrival until he

had stood watching them for more than half a minute.

"Oh! papa," exclaimed Isa, clapping her hands gleefully, "Trottie has been so capital. She asked Mr. Kinsman to kiss her, and said she loved him."

"Bravo, Trottie! And," rejoined Noel Truelock, taking one of Isa's hands, "don't you, Isa, love Mr. Kinsman too?"

"Yes, papa; but he ought to have a black beard."

"So he ought, Isa. I must lend him mine, or paint one for him."

Having greeted the visitor cordially, Noel Truelock, turning to nurse-in-attendance, said, "You can take them away now, nurse. A little of children's company is amusing enough, but much of it is a weariness to everyone save their parents."

When nurse, in obedience to this order, had withdrawn with her charges, Felix Kinsman, after looking at Noel Truelock, and then glancing at the portrait already mentioned, said, "Trottie is like both of you."

"Yes," was the answer to this delicate allusion to the artist's bereavement, "like both of us! Trottie is a little like me, and—thank God!—much more like her mother." After a few seconds' pause, Noel Truelock said, "Let me show you my studio."

On entering the artist's work-room—a lofty and well-lighted studio, which Noel Truelock had built out at the back of the house—Felix Kinsman was struck by its pictorial adornments and the luxurious richness of its furniture. Antique tables of curiously-carved oak, massive stands for folios and framed pictures, curtains of crimson velvet, ready to be drawn over doors and windows on cold nights, a bright Persian carpet, glittering like a huge gem in the middle of the polished floor, a grand piano, choice pieces of sculpture, an exquisite inlaid cabinet of superbly-bound books, on the walls a score of paintings by British artists, lounge-chairs and sofas, were amongst the articles that the clergyman's eyes encountered as they surveyed the proportions and contents of the apartment.

"This is a studio to be idle as well as to work in," he observed, in a voice of admiration.

"I fitted it up when I thought that I should never tire of working in it," Noel answered. "Clara and I spent the greater part of every day in it. There are her books, and here the Constables, which I bought as much for her pleasure as my own; and yonder her piano, strangely out of tune now, I'll be bound. Do you know anything of music?"

"Years since I was thought to be a rather clever pianist, but I have not touched an instrument for some time."

"The tuner shall come over from Needham Regis, and put the piano in order for you. I should like to hear it once again. You shall play me bits of Mendelssohn while I work."

Pointing to an easel that stood in the middle of the studio, Felix Kinsman observed, "I see you have begun to work again."

"Yes—I fixed that canvas yesterday; and I was drawing upon it for two or three hours this morning."

A droll smile brightened Noel's face as he

added, "I wish to encourage the art-critic of *The Free Speaker* to persevere in giving me good advice. Poor little Ferret's attentions deserve some reward besides the approval of his own conscience; so I am going to bear in mind 'the obligations of the artist,' and work away like a good boy. How he will exult in the consequences of his expostulations! I really should not wonder if he were to pardon me for eating an ice at the Duchess of Dandergriffin's ball. He may even condescend once again to call me 'a clever draughtsman,' when he learns that he has reclaimed me from the enervating pleasures of aristocratic halls."

Speaking and moving with a deliberateness which accorded with the composure and dignity of his face and figure, Noel True-lock exhibited the treasures of his studio—folios of David Cox's and Holland's sketches, collections of old engravings, and a comprehensive series of etchings, beginning with the old etchers, and concluding with specimens of Whistler, Legros, and Edwards. "Upon my soul!" Noel ejaculated, as he turned over

his works of modern etchers, "those men are wonderful—each in his different way is inimitable. Here is an Edwards for you, minute, severely truthful, and overflowing with love of nature. Look too at this Legros—that melancholy cottage, still, darksome pond, gaunt tree, and mournful bit of landscape, all pervaded by a mysterious sorrow and a spirit of unutterable awe. Any novelist with the slightest sympathy for the limner's art would fit that scene with a story of despair that would put the coarse sensational romances out of fashion. As for Whistler, he is the only American I ever wished to prove to be an Englishman."

Nearly two hours had passed before Noel Truelock spoke thus heartily of the merits of modern etchers; and Felix Kinsman was bethinking himself that he made an inordinately long call, when the artist remarked, "Ada tells me that you used to work at water-colour. When I come over to Sunningwold Parsonage, you must show me what you have done."

"I have nothing to show you—nothing."

For a moment a look of surprise and faint displeasure was observable in the face of the painter, who imagined that Felix Kinsman designed, at the instigation of common-place vanity, to respond to confidence with reserve, and withhold his work from critical observation.

Catching the look and its indications, the clergyman explained quickly, "I have not a single sketch left to me as a memorial of what I once did. I would gladly show you my performances if I could; but they all perished in a shipwreck that deprived me of many things that I valued much more highly, and since that mishap I have never taken a pencil in hand."

The expression of sadness and acute pain visible in the clergyman's pale and resolute countenance as he made this explanation, restrained Noel Trueblood from exhibiting any curiosity about the disaster to which his guest alluded.

"What a pity!" he remarked, with an air of only slight concern.

"For me, but not for artists. My pictures were paltry performances. At best, I was nothing more than a weak amateur."

"I don't disdain weak amateurs," rejoined the artist, "who know their weakness. Well-directed inability sometimes commands my sympathy and respect. It is despicable only when it is the condition of a presumptuous pretender. Moreover, Kinsman, I cannot believe that you were a *weak* amateur."

"I was always painfully conscious of my weakness, and of the short-comings of my work."

"A proof that you were a *strong* amateur, if not a good artist. I never knew the master who did not deplore his weakness."

After a pause he added, with the kindness of a superior naturally, but not unduly, conscious of his superiority—"You must try again. Working with me, you will perhaps do better than you did in old times."

"If you invite and encourage me in that way, you will probably see too much of me in your studio."

"No, no—not too much of you, Kinsman. That would be impossible. I am sure we shall like one another. We shall pull well together. You have had your shipwreck—I have endured mine. We two rescued mariners must help one another in life's voyage. Come here as often as you can; gossip and work with me; your chat will do me more good than all little Ferret's homilies and gibes."

"I won't stay any longer *now*, Truelock," said Felix Kinsman, shaking the artist's hand with a fervour which implied his sense of his new friend's heartiness and sincerity.

"That's right; you've followed my example and dropped the Mister. Henceforth we will be 'Truelock' and 'Kinsman.'"

When the Curate of Sunningwold had taken his departure, Noel Truelock spent an hour in solitude, pacing up and down his favourite walk in the Rookery garden, thinking over all that had transpired between himself and his visitor.

"He is a most unusual man," thought the artist, "altogether out of the common way—in

voice, appearance, style, tone, sentiment. I wonder what that shipwreck was?—an actual shipwreck, or a disaster to which he applied the term in a figurative sense? His manliness is perfect, and it is allied with such a puzzling womanliness. By Jove! he cuddled and kissed Trottie in a womanly way, not a man's way. When a man plays the nurse to a child, he separates his legs, and puts the child on his left knee, never on both knees. But Kinsman brought both his knees together—'made a lap'—and then put Trottie into it. Then he kissed her repeatedly, and fondled her as a woman might have fondled her."

After taking six more turns up and down the long path, Noel Truelock stopped short suddenly, and clenched his fist, and with it struck the air a series of little short, sharp, hammer blows, as he muttered to himself—"No, no; the notion is preposterous, ridiculous—the creation of a disordered fancy. I dismiss it. It is such an absurd notion that I won't allow it to come into my mind again."

As it pleased Mr. Noel Truelock to dismiss

the notion as too absurd and preposterous to merit serious consideration, I also dismiss it for the present, leaving it to the reader to guess what it was.

CHAPTER VII.

FELIX KINSMAN'S FRIENDS AND POPULARITY.

THE life of a large city is superior to the life of a country district in being less calculated than rural existence to engender domestic spites and foster paltry social feuds. But the country surpasses the town in opportunities for the cultivation of close friendships. The distractions of the capital are unfavourable to familiar intercourse, though fortunately they do not preclude the possibility of affectionate intimacies. Men meet at a small London dinner-party, gossip over their claret, and find themselves congenial in temper and sentiment; but on dispersing they go their different ways, and may not come together again for months,

or an entire year. They may dine at the same tables twice or thrice a season for ten consecutive years, and, though strongly disposed for thorough mutual acquaintance, may miss opportunities for seeing as much as they wish of one another, and continue to the end of the chapter mere acquaintances.

The case is otherwise in the country, where neighbours at feud, through being brought frequently in collision, sometimes grow to hate one another with a ferocity unknown to rivals in the capital; and where neighbours, living on terms of good-fellowship, are drawn within the lines of brotherly affection by the circumstances that make them constant companions, and render them largely dependent on one another for diversion and social excitement.

Noel Truelock and Felix Kinsman found themselves thoroughly congenial acquaintances. Living within two miles of each other they became close friends with a rapidity that will occasion no surprise to persons familiar with country life, though it may appear unnatural and comical to readers who know nothing of the condi-

tions and moral forces of rural existence. I am not talking of the country life of grand folk, whose periodical terms of rural residence are spent in feudal castles and baronial halls that are frequented during the shooting and hunting seasons by ever-changing crowds of aristocratic and fashionable visitors,—a kind of country life, by the way, of which I have very little knowledge that is not derived from the descriptions of novelists, whose personal acquaintance with such exalted existence is, I suspect, not much more extensive and accurate than my own.—I speak of the country life of modest, home-loving squires, whose highest social distinction is their magisterial rank; of country clergymen, and doctors, and lawyers, and gentle yeomen, who, without thinking scornfully, or even humbly, of their ancestors and worth, are too modest and sensible and proud ever to think of themselves as members of “the county” society of their respective shires.

The most important personages of the Sunningwold “set,” to which my readers are introduced, are a few old-fashioned people having status

in quite a lowly grade of the local aristocracy ; a few well-beneficed and fairly-educated rectors, with no pretensions to patrician quality ; a few rather prosperous squires, like the Normans, and Pethericks, and Godbolds, who, though very great people in their own parishes and under the shadow of their own trees—especially at times of contested elections—are scarcely known even by name to the squires of like degree living on the other side of the county. The richest man in the whole set is Squire Clissold, who, though his name may be found on the roll of a certain club in Pall-mall, is seldom seen in London unless he is on his way through the capital to a grand Agricultural Show in a distant county, or has come up to the metropolis, shortly before Christmas, to receive yet another silver tankard or cup from the judges of the Smithfield Cattle Club.

It was into a "set" of this prosperous and thoroughly gentle kind that the Reverend Felix Kinsman was received promptly and cordially on establishing himself at Sunningwold. And when I remember the ordinary fate of the

Anglican curate,—when I recall how many of our subordinate clergy, gentlemen of high culture and perfect refinement (who have borne themselves honourably at their universities, where collegiate life has trained them to appreciate the pleasures and need the stimulus of familiar intercourse with persons of learning and taste), are compelled to toil on rural cures, where an uneducated grazier or pompous land-agent is their principal parishioner, and where the local society of the educated sort consists altogether of a few indigent clergy scattered at wide intervals about a sparsely populated district,—I think my readers will agree with me in saying that Felix Kinsman was an unusually lucky fellow in lighting upon a curacy in so picturesque and agreeable a neighbourhood.

Felix Kinsman had good reason to congratulate himself on the merits of his new home and its surroundings; and, unlike many fortunate persons, he was fully sensible of his good fortune. Moreover, being of a sympathetic and affectionate disposition, he attached himself very quickly and strongly to his new

friends. His regard for Squire Clissold grew more cordial as the weeks passed. Besides being the most piquant and brilliant little creature he had ever seen, Ada was soon regarded by him as a model of a sweet-tempered, unselfish, loveable girl. It would have been strange if the curate had not grown her enthusiastic admirer; for, grateful to him for the tender considerateness which he exhibited to her brother, and naturally affected by his rare personal and intellectual qualities, Hardy Clissold's daughter treated Jemmy's tutor with sisterly frankness, and with the quiet, trustful, confidential communicativeness that always qualified her demeanour to people who stood high in her good graces. Had she known how likely that confiding, tender, cooing manner was to rouse sentiments of fervent love in the breast of a young clergyman, she would have been less demonstrative of her good-will towards Mr. Kinsman, if not conventionally formal and distant to him. But love of that kind was an affair about which the unsophisticated girl had never troubled her head. It was a sentiment

that had never occasioned her heart a single pulsation. She was, moreover, almost entirely ignorant of the subtle might and perilous force of her fascinations; a statement which, though it may appear incredible to some of my readers, will be readily believed by those of them who have had much experience of the simplicity and genuine modesty of gently-nurtured English maidens.

The amusement which Mrs. Porchester occasioned Felix Kinsman was largely qualified with liking; for, whilst experiencing a humourist's delight in her affectation of unselfish and her steady pursuit of private ends, he saw that she *was* practically considerate for others, and contributed much to the happiness of the household of which she was the mistress. He could not fail to see that it would be well for the world if all selfish persons always exhibited in their self-seeking policies the same conciliatory spirit and evenness of temper that characterized that lady's contrivances. Anyhow Mrs. Porchester was assiduous in paying hypocrisy's tribute to the virtue which she did not possess

—and that is more than can be said of many faulty people. She was too much of a gentlewoman, in the artificial sense of the word, to display any insulting airs of patronage to the young man whom she secretly regarded as “only the new curate and Jemmy’s tutor!” Perhaps she saw the possibility of certain consequences from Ada’s familiar intercourse with Felix Kinsman; but it is certain that, if she foresaw them, she was not a person likely to denounce them as preposterous and unendurable. Mrs. Porchester in her heart hoped that an early marriage would remove from Sunningwold Hall the young lady whose presence in it might delay, or even altogether preclude the accomplishment of an ambition cherished by the prudent widow. Of course she was too amiable a woman not to wish Ada to marry well, and to possess every conceivable happiness. But if Ada should ever wish to marry a comparatively poor and humble man—say a young clergyman, with enough private property to render it not criminally imprudent for a girl, of some four hundreds a

year, to marry him—Maria Porchester was ready to sacrifice her own wishes for a grander settlement for her darling Ada, and even to remove obstacles to the attainment of her pet's wishes. In fact, the benevolence of the exemplary gentlewoman was only limited by her regard for herself.

The feelings with which Felix Kinsman at first regarded his pupil were chiefly those of compassion, qualified with sympathetic admiration of the "pluck" with which the fragile boy made light of his melancholy condition, and concealed his sufferings from his tender-hearted father. And these feelings continued to have power when they were conjoined with the love and reverence which Felix Kinsman soon learnt to cherish for Jenmy's marvellous goodness and simple wisdom. There was no gloom in the composure and steadiness with which the lad looked forward to an early death. His theological training had fortunately not been of a kind calculated to inspire him with agonizing doubts and alarms at the thought of eternity. To his imagination to die was to

be liberated from an afflicting body, and to ascend to a bright and guileless world, where he would ere long be joined by all those who were dear to him on earth. The only sorrow given him by this prevision of death was a tranquil grief for the temporary separation from objects of his love which the departure from this life would involve.

There was not much, therefore, in his familiar association with Jemmy to depress Mr. Kinsman. In a few weeks the tutor and the boy loved each other thoroughly. The teacher's office was not arduous, for Jemmy was one of those rarely-endowed children who may be almost left to teach themselves. Two hours a-day—hours taken either in the morning or the afternoon, in accordance with the engagements of the pupil or his instructor—was the time allotted to the lessons, for which Jemmy made preparations with careful zeal and romantic ardour. Work done over his books was work done for his tutor—a consideration that to Jemmy rendered the toil of study delightful. At other times the boy and his pre-

ceptor were close companions. When Felix Kinsman drove hither and thither to look at the lions of the Sunningwold neighbourhood, Jemmy accompanied him, acting as his guide whilst lying upon the inclined plane of the pony phaeton, which had been bought and fitted up for the cripple's special convenience. The clergyman was an expert and enthusiastic angler, and whenever he fished in the Grill Jemmy might nearly always have been found reclining on the river's bank, at a point where he could watch his tutor's operations, or reach him with a blast of his pocket-whistle. Again and again Felix Kinsman tugged the boy's wheeling-couch about the Sunningwold garden, and over the meandering walks of the park's belt of plantation. Had Ada been capable of jealousy respecting the affections of the brother, her love of whom was the strongest and warmest passion of her breast, she might reasonably have resented the influence which Felix Kinsman in the course of a few weeks gained over his pupil. But Ada never for an instant grudged Felix Kinsman any of the

love which appeared to her to be unspeakably precious. She was glad that the tutor had his reward, though she knew that Jemmy listened with longing for the sound of his teacher's coming footsteps as he had never listened for hers, and that he always flushed for joy at Mr. Kinsman's approach, under an impulse of gladness far more vivid than the gratification which her re-appearance occasioned him. The reader is right who says that Jemmy's enthusiasm for his tutor is scarcely natural in one of his sex—is the love of a schoolgirl for her governess, rather than the love of a thirteen-year-old lad for his tutor. Jemmy's constitutional delicacy and peculiar training had produced their natural, and, at the same time, unnatural results in his character. In his confiding spirit and romantic affectionateness, the heir of Sunningwold was a girl rather than a boy.

Nor was the new curate less successful in winning the approval of his humbler parishioners than in gaining influence over the inmates of Sunningwold Hall. The villagers

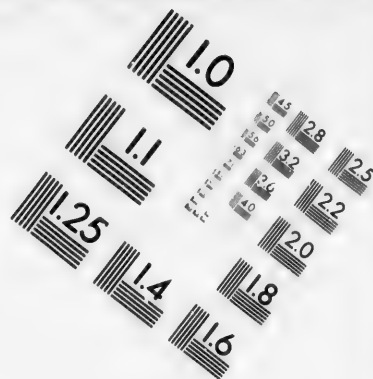
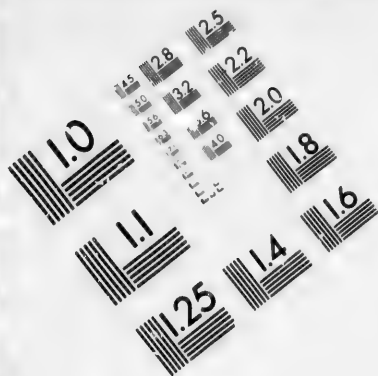
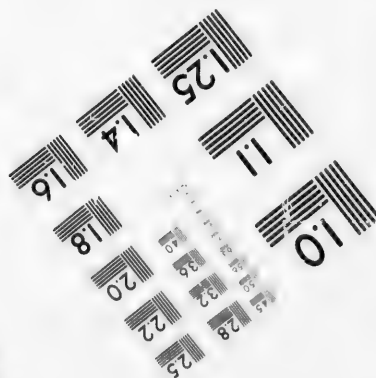
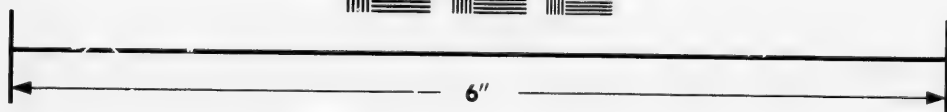
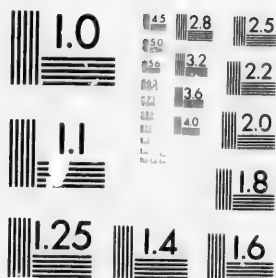


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were enthusiastic in their praise of the young clergyman who entered their cottages with the air of an equal rather than of a patron, and gossiped with them about their wages, labour, gardens, management of bees, and other humble interests, in a tone of respectful familiarity, and with abundant manifestations of intelligence and sympathy. The children of the Sunday and week-day schools were drawn to him by the kindness of his manner, that was altogether devoid of pedagogic severity and authoritativeness. The Dissenters—for the Sunningwold neighbourhood had Dissenters, whose action in parochial politics accounted for, if it did not justify, the Squire's animosity against "pograms"—were mollified by Mr. Kinsman's demeanour in a degree scarcely acceptable to their special ministers, who, whilst regarding the clergyman's conciliatory line of action with lively suspicion, were constrained to admit that he was a charitable and courteous opponent. The deferential tone and obviously sincere respectfulness which distinguished the curate's

demeanour to Non-conformists flattered the enemies of the church, and made them concur in the opinion that he was a gentleman, and a singularly inoffensive representative of the episcopal system. Moreover, social opinion in Sunningwold was not the less favourable to the new clergyman when it was discovered that he was a gentleman of private means, which he was ready to employ for the benefit of the parish. Felix Kinsman's alacrity in helping the poorer people of his flock with money as well as counsel, and the liberality which caused him to extend his munificence to Dissenters, became matters of village table-talk. And when it was rumoured about the neighbourhood that he had determined to spend on the needs of Sunningwold Church the £200 a-year which Mr. Clissold paid him for acting as Jemmy's tutor, the Normans, Pethericks, Godbolds, and other personages of the local quality were confirmed in their resolve not to treat or think of him as an "ordinary curate and nothing more."

The excellence of Mr. Kinsman's sermons,

and the impressive melodiousness of the voice with which he read the services of the church, soon drew to his church the residents of neighbouring parishes, whose approval of the new-comer helped to spread his good report throughout the district. The arrival at Sunningwold of the organ, which he gave to the church two months after his arrival in the parsonage, was a memorable event in the annals of the parish, and the excitement occasioned by the gift gained strength when it was announced that Miss Clissold had promised to officiate as organist until Mr. Kinsman could find a duly qualified female teacher, who would be at the same time the governess of the girls' school and the official musician of the congregation. The pains which the curate took to teach his school-children psalmody, and to improve the congregational music of his people, may be held in some degree accountable for the rapid increase of the number of the habitual attendants at his church. But it is certain that the simple folk who came over to divine service at Sunning-

would from adjacent hamlets and rather distant homesteads were attracted chiefly by the clergyman's voice and sermons. It was averred in the dwellings of pious artisans and peasants that Mr. Kinsman's sermons were "full of practical gospel," by which expressions the eulogists, it may be presumed, meant to say that the discourses instructed them how to put the precepts of Christianity in practice, and make their lives accord with the rules of their religion ; and having listened to several of these discourses, I may, without presuming to be a theological critic, testify that they were homilies highly calculated to assist commonplace, clumsy, devout mortals in their struggles with the devil.

Instead of denouncing their natures as abominably corrupt, and their hearts as altogether sinful, the preacher—using simple words and short, kind sentences—explained to his hearers the forces of man's nature ; taught them the uses and qualities of their mental and moral endowments ; brought under their observation the processes by which the

evil conquers the good of a human being, and those by which the good of a reasonable creature may be made to conquer the evil that is warring with it. He withdrew the veil of ignorance from Satan's operations, which are much less mysterious and inexplicable than simple folk are wont to suppose. And together with its little lesson in psychology, each of his discourses conveyed salutary counsel and instructive suggestions, illustrated by those anecdotes in which, ever since Chaucer's days, and time far further back, humble hearers of homilies have always delighted. Thus he taught slothful servants to conquer their sloth, morose husbands to overcome their repulsive churlishness, ill-tempered wives to get the better of their peevishness, and knavish dealers to see the wickedness and eradicate the causes of their petty, pilfering, thievish ways. So also he taught children to be dutiful, and loving, and watchful against the first beginnings of naughtiness.

Nor let it be imagined that, whilst giving heed to the delinquencies and failings of the

poor, he took no notice of the faults of the rich. His sermon against poaching—composed and delivered at the Squire's special request—insisted on the wickedness of those who disobeyed the laws of the land, and called attention to the demoralization and crimes observable amongst those who ventured to infringe the statutes for the preservation of creatures of sport; but drawing the line between human and divine laws, it reflected with indignation on persons who enforced the former with harshness. Indeed, I am disposed to think that, had Hardy Clissold been as sagacious as he was an attentive auditor of this sermon on the game-laws, he would not have afterwards commended it as “a sound, sensible discourse, that ought to be printed in letters of gold, and hung up in every agricultural labourer's cottage.” So also Mr. Kinsman's sermons on the obligations of the rich, and the duties of employers, contained statements that might in some English parishes have been regarded as insidious attempts to inspire servants and poor folk with

disaffection towards masters and capitalists. But fortunately for the deliverer of those discourses and their humbler hearers, Hardy Clissold's benevolence was so notorious and so influential on his wealthier neighbours, that the preacher's statements of the responsibilities and duties of the opulent were more likely to be construed as eulogies of the neighbouring magistrates than as attacks upon them.

Such were the sermons which Felix Kinsman used to deliver to the rustic listeners who thronged his church every Sunday, filling every pew and open seat, occupying every stool in the aisles and every bench in the gallery, and sometimes covering every square foot of standing room under the roof of the sacred building. And of all the persons who came habitually from the surrounding parishes to hear the persuasive orator, no one was a more regular attendant or more delighted auditor than Noel Truelock, who, whilst in residence at Bridgeham Rookery, never omitted

on any single Sunday to be present at the two services in Sunningwold Church.

Being human, and therefore imperfect creatures, the non-conforming ministers of the neighbourhood, and some of Felix Kinsman's brethren of "the cloth," were more disposed to deery the popular curate than to join in sounding his praises. It was hinted by these dissentients from prevailing opinion that far too much was made of the young clergyman, whose professional qualifications comprised no university degree, and whose theatrical elocution was scarcely accordant with the solemnity of his office. Doubts were whispered in one or two ecclesiastical quarters whether the Sunningwold curate was not, for the gratification of his vanity, occasioning an excitement likely to be highly prejudicial to the spiritual health of his idolaters. In these quarters it was also regarded as certain that the ladies who flocked to Mr. Kinsman's church were more enamoured of his "pretty face" and "dainty person" than they would care to admit.

Truth to tell, Felix Kinsman failed to win the good opinion of any large proportion of his clerical neighbours. The three or four rectors who visited and followed pleasure in the Sunningwold Hall "set" were friendly with him, but they were ecclesiastics of a worldly sort—men more thoughtful about partridges than church parties, and prouder of their pedigrees than their "cloth;" ordained squires, in fact, who were sport-loving magistrates on six days of the week, and slovenly priests on Sundays. The other clergy of the neighbourhood were divided into the Evangelical party and the High Church party. When Felix Kinsman, ten days after his arrival at Sunningwold, politely declined an invitation to a prayer-meeting at Fullerton Rectory, sent to him by the Reverend Micah Howlett, Rector of Fullerton, it speedily became known to Mr. Howlett's numerous sympathizers that the Sunningwold curate was not "with them," but "against them." A week later Mr. Kinsman offended the other and smaller division of the local clergy by

declining to subscribe five shillings to a fund to defray the expenses which a famous leader of the London ritualists had incurred in a Court of Law. This refusal determined the High Churchmen of the neighbourhood to "leave Mr. Kinsman alone—at least for the present." Three weeks later it was generally known in the clerical cliques of the district that Felix Kinsman was a Broad Churchman; and, in 1866, the Sunningwold country knew just nothing of Broad Churchism, save that it was a new and odious heresy, with Kingsley for its head, and cricket for one of its chief objects.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE HALL AND THE ROOKERY.

HARDY CLISSOLD'S partridges had been reduced to a number barely sufficient for the perpetuation of their species in the interests of sport; the rising pheasantry of the Sunningwold woods had been put down by brisk fusillades; and Noel Truelock had for some few weeks been maintaining his equestrian reputation with the Rumborough fox hounds, when the Squire received a letter from London, announcing that Mr. Reuben Bloxham, Assistant Deputy Surveyor of the Board of Internal Control, was at liberty to pay one of his frequent visits to Sunningwold Hall.

"Bravo!" exclaimed the Squire, after read-

ing the letter at his breakfast-table. "Reuben Bloxham is always welcome at Sunningwold. The bay mare and brown cob must be put in the top of condition, for Ben likes his days out with the hounds. I'll speak to George Harsant about it this very morning. It will be quite convenient to you, Maria, to give Cousin Reuben a bed?"

"What a question, Hardy!" responded Mrs. Porchester. "If it were not convenient, I should be only too glad to sacrifice myself."

So the Squire wrote to Reuben Bloxham, bidding him come for a week and stay for a month, and so much longer as the authorities of the Internal Control Department would allow him to be absent from London.

Anticipation of Ben's arrival occasioned an agreeable excitement at the Hall; and when Felix appeared, an hour or so after the coming of Mr. Bloxham's letter, he heard a good deal about the expected visitor. "My mother was a Bloxham," the Squire explained to Felix; "and her brother, the late Mr. Baron Blox-

ham, of the Court of Exchequer, was Reuben's grandfather. Reuben's father got into difficulties, and left his son just nothing but his blessing and honest name; but the young man is a very proper and rising gentleman, and is well heard of at the Internal Control. He ain't much to look at, but he is a good one to go—action sure, though by no means showy; virtues many, vice none." Said Ada, "He is such a dear awkward fellow that it is impossible not to like him." Jemmy remarked, "He is wonderfully strong and good-natured, and has many a time carried me upstairs in his arms. You'll like Ben, Mr. Kinsman."

Before giving Jemmy his lessons that morning Felix Kinsman took a turn on the terrace with Mrs. Porchester, when that lady expatiated on Reuben Bloxham's merits in a very confidential and significant manner. "Hardy Clissold," she observed, scanning the tutor's face furtively, as she spoke words intended to produce more than a transient effect on their hearer, "cherishes a warm affection for Reu-

ben, who is so amiable and upright and worthy a young man that every one likes him. He is not showy, nor accomplished, nor brilliant, but he possesses sterling qualities that will ensure happiness to the woman who may become his wife. He is devoted to Ada—absurdly devoted to her—watches her just as though she owned him, and he were a big, clumsy, lumbering, honest old mastiff. And sometimes I almost wish that Ada might wake up to a consciousness of his affection, and respond to it; for he is just the man to make a girl happy—not proudly happy, Mr. Kinsman, but serenely felicitous.”

In reply, Mr. Kinsman assured Mrs. Porchester that he was strongly prepossessed in Reuben's favour by what he had heard of him.

“It would of course be a humble settlement for my Ada, whose beauty and talents and birth would entitle her to be the mistress of any house within ten miles of Sunningwold; and of course I should prefer to see her marry in a class rather above than in one a little below her position. But Hardy and I have

agreed that we will never put any constraint on her affections. Ada will never give her heart to any man who is not a gentleman; she is therefore free to choose her own husband; and if she were to select Reuben Bloxham, I should sacrifice my own wishes, and think only of her happiness."

Having thus informed Felix that no reputable gentleman would be regarded as an ineligible suitor for Ada's hand, and that, should he fall in love with Jemmy's sister, he would have Reuben for a rival, and a *dangerous* rival, Mrs. Porchester started off for an interview with Ann Dawson at the hennery, and left the tutor to discharge his morning's duties to Jemmy.

In the evening of that same day Felix Kinsman went over to Bridgeham Rookery, and spent an hour or two in the studio, playing bits of Mozart and Mendelssohn on the retuned and thoroughly restored grand piano, whilst Noel Truelock, who had been out with the fox-hounds in the morning, reclined in a luxurious chair near the fire, and smoked

Turkish tobacco in a huge meerschaum pipe.

"That's a sweet thing, Kinsman!" observed the artist, taking his amber mouth-piece from his lips as the clergyman rose from the piano and approached the fire. "Who composed it?"

"Arthur Sullivan!"

"Ah, I thought so! What a man he is!"

"Superb!"

"You ought to smoke, Kinsman."

"Why?"

"It's so vastly pleasant, and if Mr. Solly is right, it shortens life."

"In this world."

"That's something in favour of tobacco."

"If ever I commit suicide, the crime shall not be effected by a slow process."

"How would you set to work to demonstrate the sin of suicide? Death and Life are equally arrangements of the divine power. Why does a man sin against the divine purpose in compassing his death, any more than when he effects a brief continuation of life?"

Consider the case of a man whose obligations to his fellow-creatures have all been discharged to the best of his ability, whose condition renders it absolutely impossible for him to be of any further use to a single human creature, and whose continuance on earth can only result in distress to himself and misery to others. Consider that man's case."

"I do."

"He commits suicide. Demonstrate to me the sinfulness of his conduct."

"You've put a nice question to me,—one that I don't care to answer without consideration. I'll think the matter over, and perhaps make it the subject of a sermon."

"Thank you. The hold, Kinsman, that you get over the minds and affections of people is chiefly due to your respectfulness and sincerity. You always treat words spoken to you as though they were worthy of respectful consideration, and never reply to them with quackery. Now, a clerical charlatan, on being posed as you are—for the moment, would begin with a 'Why, it is obvious to

every reasonable creature,' and pour forth a lot of wordy coverings of his own ignorance. I wish all official teachers were like you."

"I should be very sorry to think that the majority of them were in any way my inferiors. If you wish to make me what you are pleased to call 'a clerical charlatan,' debauch me with flattery. You should not praise me to my face. I admire your paintings, as much as you do my sermons, but I am very rarely guilty of the bad taste of telling you that I admire them."

"You are quite right, Kinsman. Friends should be careful to avoid practices of mutual adulation. Noel Truelock sits reprov'd. And mind you, my boy, he'll come down heavily upon you if you ever commend his artistic cunning to his face."

After a pause, during which Noel Truelock laid aside his pipe, and Felix Kinsman mixed for himself a glass of claret and water, the clergyman remarked, "The people at Sunningwold Hall are expecting a visitor, Mr. Reuben Bloxham."

"To be sure, it is his time for showing himself there,—indeed it is rather late for his Autumn holiday. The affairs of the Internal Control have detained him in town, I suppose."

"The Clissolds, one and all, tell me that he is a marvellously good fellow."

A smile, expressive of lively amusement, took possession of the artist's handsome face as he rejoined, "So he is,—a marvellously good fellow;—so winningly honest and simple, and so comically awkward! He will be riding with me after the hounds. What awful croppers and purlers the dear boy does come in for! But Ben's bones are made of gutta-percha, and don't break; and nothing puts him out of temper. To be soused in a clear stream, or pitched head-foremost into a muddy ditch, only makes him laugh like thunder."

"I hear his good-nature—a quality, by the way, in which no man ought to be deficient—is perfect."

"In that respect the man has not his equal.

He is Ada's most humble admirer. He watches her like a faithful old dog, and pants with delight whenever she is benignant to him."

"And that she is usually, I suppose."

"She never worries him—at least, never means to worry him. But she can't help bantering him now and then about his awkwardness. You know she has not the faintest suspicion of the meaning of his attentions. Ada is too much of a child still to imagine what the dear old boy means by puffing and panting at her heels."

"Mrs. Porchester told me that he adored her."

"Whew!—did she? And would she sacrifice herself to the extent of letting him marry her?"

"If Ada were to wish for him."

"I dare say that she told you so."

"She did."

"Don't think yourself specially honoured by her confidence. She has told me the same thing."

"It appears that Mr. Clissold has no very

ambitious views for his daughter's settlement."

"Mrs. Porchester has none, which is just about the same thing. Between ourselves, Mrs. Porchester feels that she has sacrificed herself long enough for her darling Ada, and would conclude her career of service to her by planting her out comfortably in marriage."

"The Squire—Heaven bless him!—would miss the girl's sunny face."

"Yes, he will be lonely and doleful for a while. But Maria will console him, Kinsman. Her course of self-sacrifice is not completed yet."

The tone in which Noel Truelock gave this assurance was so truly comical that Felix Kinsman laughed heartily, though he was not prone to make merry at the expense of his friends, and would have preferred to smile in his sleeve at Mrs. Porchester's peculiarities.

To turn the conversation from a topic on the border-ground of scandal, Felix Kinsman, after recovering from his fit of laughter, said,

"You have not been working to-day?"

"No, but I was hard at it yesterday. 'Iphigenia' will be a big picture, and I am advancing to my satisfaction. Bessy Scrutton, my nurse's sister, is an excellent model. How that girl, born of thoroughly respectable, notably flat-nosed parents, came by her Grecian face and faultless figure, is a question for the physiologists to settle."

"How often one sees beauty, of a particular quality and type, in the very places where one would think it least likely to find it! The most elegant and lovely woman it has ever been my good fortune to admire is a butcheress at Caen, in Normandy. 'A daughter of the gods, divinely tall and most divinely fair,' she spends all her days in a small butcher's stall in one of the narrowest streets of Caen, serving scraps of uncooked meat to needy customers, who lay their sous down on the block on which my fascinating butcheress cuts up masses of red muscle."

"I will run over to Caen next Autumn and have a look at her."

"You wouldn't dare to ask her to be your model. She looks so superbly proud as she sharpens her knives on the steel that hangs from her girdle."

"Wait till next Autumn. In the meantime, I propose to do a deal of work. I am beginning to like my work again. I am outgrowing misery. I could not have made the drawing of 'Iphigenia' last year—could not have imagined it. To work effectively an artist must be happy."

"There are those who imagine that art is so fruitful of consolation for wretchedness that its earnest follower forgets all private miseries in the exercise of his vocation."

"They who think that have made no close acquaintance with grief."

"Desire for fame is a noble and salutary stimulant. Is it not stronger than the stings of misfortune?"

"Not more powerful than the deadening, torpefying influences of stupendous calamity," Noel Truelock answered, as he leaned forwards in his seat, and looked searchingly

into his companion's unflinching eyes. "Remember the enormity and hideousness of my sorrow."

"I do."

"Fame!—pah! what is it? To be written up and down by half a score Ferrets, who know just enough of art and have just enough literary culture to be able to scribble with alternate flippancy and pompousness about artists and their labours. Can you deem me capable of caring for the praise and blame of such men? And yet I did care for their praise."

"When it was discerning and unaffectedly sympathetic."

"It was never either the one or the other. I cared for it because Clara liked to read such printed flattery as the art-critics used to pour upon me, under the notion that they were rewarding merit and educating public taste. I thirsted and hungered for the fame of reviewers' praise, when it brought the light of gladness into Clara's eyes, and made her cheeks glow with happiness and exultant

pride. But all that sweet, foolish joy is of the past."

"It may be renewed years hence, and found sweeter than ever," suggested Felix Kinsman, whose fancy that Noel Truelock would ere long find a second wife in Ada Clissold was countenanced by all his observations of their intercourse.

It appeared to the clergyman impossible for the artist to spend several hours every week with Ada, directing her art-studies, sympathizing with her endeavours, commending her labours, without conceiving the desire to make so gentle and fascinating a pupil his wife.

"It is all well to talk of the delights of artistic effort," continued Noel Truelock, apparently unheeding of his companion's hint; "but my desolation robbed art of its power to delight me. It reduced me to the utter hopelessness of a mortal rendered blind to every kind of beauty. It made 'I don't care' the burden of my unspoken thoughts. The grief which deprives a man of the power to

enjoy anything is as cruel and devastating to him as the misfortune which bereaves him of everything capable of affording felicity to a mind in health and at ease. Why, man, my wife's death brought me to a condition of dull, stupefying woe in which fate denied me the solace that would have been mine had I been capable of the passions of sorrow. But there was no passion in my despair. I never shed a tear from the moment of her last breath until I heard the clods rattling on her coffin-lid; and when I had returned from the churchyard to this room I lay for half an hour on yonder sofa, gasping spasmodically, like a big trout just pulled out of the water. After awhile I rose and walked out into the woods, and for more than two years I lived without a friend or a pleasure, in scenes that had no beauty and amidst sounds that had no music, although I remained in my old haunts, and was surrounded by my nearest and choicest acquaintances. When, Kinsman, you have passed through such grief as I have endured, you

will know how completely the artist's delights may be dissipated and driven clean away by his woes."

The egotistic taunt, which concluded this statement of doleful memories achieved precisely what it was intended to accomplish. By the livid paleness that seized the listener's face, and the angry glow that chased away the pallor, by the writhing of his hearer's lips, and the fierce flashes of his indignant and sad eyes, Noel Truelock, lying backwards in his lounge-chair, and watching the results of his skilful attack, saw how he wounded and incensed Felix Kinsman, and for the moment stripped him of his customary armour of caution and reserve.

"Your misfortunes were sharp and terrible, Truelock. They have my sympathy; though perhaps you 'don't care' for the compassion of a man whom you despise as a mere novice and apprentice in earthly trouble. But don't allow your recollections to infuse you with egotistic insolence, and a belief that your griefs are unparalleled. Don't in your pride of

grief forget that thousands of men have suffered far more than yourself."

"Poor devils!" Noel Truelock interposed sneeringly, with the deliberate purpose of irritating yet further his excited friend. "I would rather not believe in their existence."

"You ought to believe in them. At the worst, you had your friends, and children, and home, and old haunts. *You* never lost *them*, though for awhile you lost the power of enjoying them. When the disease and gloom of your weakened mind disappeared, you found yourself rich as ever in the world's honour and sympathy, and surrounded by men and women who had never ceased to love you—ay, whose affectionate concern for you had been increased by your inability to respond to it. But I could tell you of a man who, through no single fault of his own, but through an enemy's hate and a concurrence of malicious influences, fell suddenly from an estate of honour, in which he had every one's love, to a condition of unsurpassable ignominy, in which he was incessantly flogged and torn

with the whips of social scorn. This man lost everything—not in imagination, but in fact—home, repute, love, influence. Nothing in the world was left to him to care for but two domestic companions—two women, whose confidence in his goodness no torrent of successful slander had shaken. These two women—a true, brave, glorious sister and a faithful serving-woman—were the only creatures whose hearts remained true to him in his dismal fate; and them death snatched suddenly from him. That man was left alone in the universe, to toil on dutifully to death, working amongst strangers, whilst concealing from them the circumstances of his black and hideous story. What,” he asked, raising his voice, and speaking with bitterness, even with fierceness, “is your sorrow, taken at its worst, in comparison with the grief which this wretch will endure when time has done all that it can effect to confirm his courage and mitigate his woe?”

Rising from his seat ere he replied to this question, and approaching Felix Kinsman, who also rose at the same moment, Noel Truelock

laid his right hand lightly on his friend's shoulder, and then, looking into his face, said, "Nothing—my sorrow is nothing in comparison with such a fate. You have cured me of my morbid egotism. Whenever I find myself brooding weakly over my grief, I will think of yours and take shame to myself."

"No, no, don't give a thought to my misfortunes," Felix replied, "for which I require no man's bootless pity. I would rather have kept them altogether from your knowledge, but you extorted from me a reference to matters that are accountable for the sadness which always covers me, though I contrive to withhold it from the world's observation." After a brief interval of silence he added, in a tone of entreaty, "You have me in your power, Truelock. Don't, don't ever again goad me into speaking of old troubles, about which I wish to be silent—even to you."

"You shall never have need, Kinsman, to repeat that injunction," the artist rejoined courteously. "Don't go away, dear boy—sit down again, and stay with me a little longer."

"No, I must be off. It is best for me to be alone."

Seeing that Felix Kinsman meant what he said, Noel Truelock did not solicit him again to prolong his visit; but the artist ventured to accompany his guest to the gate of his garden, before bidding him good-bye.

It was a clear, starlight night, and as the two friends shook hands at the garden-gate they looked upwards at the spangled firmament.

"That is a sight," Noel observed, "sublimely eloquent of the insignificance of human troubles. Looking up to those immeasurably distant worlds, moving in fields that are the mere borders of illimitable space, how dare we fret and trouble ourselves about our little paltry transient cares?"

"That is a lesson, Truelock," the clergyman replied, "for which I often thank the night whose darkness enables us to discern the marvellous beauties of the heavens, which the light of day renders invisible to us. The blackness of sorrow resembles the darkness of night.

Just as the one displays the stars, the other reveals to us the splendours and glories of the spiritual universe—the constellations by which grief-laden mariners guide their course over the waters of eternity—the burning truths and radiant hopes that are unknown to mortals whom the gloom of misery and the shades of despair have never enlightened.”

The friends separated without another word.

And as Felix Kinsman walked along the Sunningwold road, whose silence was broken only by the sound of his feet and the falling of withered leaves, he thought to himself, “That man suspects my secret. At times I think that he has discovered it. But he will never betray me to the world, or wilfully show me that he has penetrated my mask and sees beneath my disguise. I don’t fear him—for he loves me with a brother’s love. But he is more than my friend—he is my master! I cannot resist his power. I tried to be silent when he goaded me into talking about the past; but he *meant* me to speak. There is no secret of my breast that he could not con-

strain me to surrender. If it were his will to force me to confess everything, I should tell him all, fall at his feet, and implore him to pardon me. The ordinary people of this pleasant spot are drawn to me by forces which make me their ruler. I am drawn to him because he is my conqueror and master. Thus weakness governs what is weaker, and the strong yields to the stronger all the world over. Each of us is at the same time lord and slave. But who is *his* master? If I were not what calamities have made me, I might be his ruler as well as his slave. But that may not be. He is lord of several servants, and Ada Clissold is the one who will be raised to govern him."

And whilst Felix Kinsman was thus communing with himself, under the branches of the trees that made the Sunningwold Road one long tortuous avenue, Noel Truelock, having returned to his customary seat in his studio, was saying to himself, "I must be careful not to frighten him by imprudent inquisitiveness, or drive him from me by tyrannical insolence.

I suspect his secret, and I will work noiselessly, cautiously, resolutely, till I know the whole of it. Whatever it is—even though the mystery be a crime—he is a noble creature, whose fate and mine will be twisted into one thread. He thinks I am in love with Ada Clissold. If my suspicions are right, he will not like me to confirm him in his opinion by playing the part of her lover. Poor little Ada! She is far more likely to fall in love with Jemmy's tutor than with her own art-teacher, or that dear old splay-footed coof, Reuben Bloxham!"

A few minutes later Noel Truelock rose from his seat, and, leaving the studio, walked noiselessly up a dark staircase and along an unlit passage to a room which he entered on tip-toe, and so quietly that he could hear his own light breathings as he approached the two beds that a shaded night-taper rendered visible.

Over these beds—each of which contained a sleeping child—Noel Truelock stood for several minutes, watching the sleepers' faces, which became momentarily more clearly dis-

cernible to him as his vision accommodated itself to the dim light of the chamber. There were the artist's little daughters, Isa and Trottie. "Poor babes," the father thought, as he stooped and peered into their faces, "you will need a mother soon. Where shall I find a mother for you?"

CHAPTER IX.

REUBEN BLOXHAM'S POLICY OF CANDOUR AND
CONFIDENCE.

WHEN Reuben Bloxham had arrived at the Hall, Felix Kinsman found him, so far as his appearance was concerned, all that Mrs. Porchester and Noel Truelock had declared him to be. A more awkward, lumbering young Englishman than the Deputy Assistant Surveyor of the Board of Internal Control it would be difficult to discover within the lines of gentle society. Meanness and insignificance, however, were faults that no one could charge against his aspect and bearing: for Reuben's stature was considerably above the average height of his countrymen; and though he stood on his big splay feet in a

manner that any dancing-master would have declared monstrous, it was obvious that the short-necked, broad-shouldered Government clerk was a gentleman.

His head, rounded like a bomb, was inclined to baldness, though he had not completed his thirty-second year; and his face was distinguished by so grotesque and thoroughly comical a kind of ugliness that even people of good nature and breeding, on being introduced to him, found it a hard task to conceal the amusement which his visage occasioned them when it was unusually animated. Scarcely a shadow of hair was discernible on either of the brows that over-arched his keen, merry, twinkling grey eyes. The nose, which afforded more of character than comeliness to his ludicrous physiognomy, was singularly flat in its higher part, and in its lower section broadened out so that its end was an angular knob, contrasted with which Henry Brougham's nasal organ would have appeared a thing of beauty. Ben was much given to smiles and jovial laughter; and when he smiled compla-

cently, or laughed uproariously, his large mouth expanded and widened outwards in every direction, till beholders, strange to the creature's ways, expected to see the enlarging circle in another minute push all the surrounding features out of sight. To an actor ambitious of renown in low comedy, Reuben's face would have been a valuable possession; but far from wishing to conquer the world by reducing it to laughter, he disdained the jester's triumphs, and prided himself chiefly on the sobriety and orderliness of his nature. It was, moreover, his bad and the world's good fortune that he never appeared more irresistibly absurd than when he made extraordinary exertions to assume an impressively serious manner, and wished to exhibit the business-like gravity appropriate in an aspirant for official promotion. That he was justified in crediting himself with soundness of judgment and natural aptitude for business, the opinion held of him by the authorities of the Internal Control Department testified. Nor was that opinion discountenanced by his appearance and bear-

ing, which, notwithstanding their whimsical peculiarities, were abundantly expressive of energy and intelligence. In his favour also it should be recorded that, on becoming familiar with his grotesqueness, people grew insensible to the comicalness of his aspect, and were at a loss to say why, on first making his acquaintance, they were tempted to laugh in his face.

During the eighteen days which Reuben Bloxham stayed at Sunningwold Hall, Felix Kinsman saw less than he had expected to see of the Deputy-Assistant Surveyor, who, when not panting about Ada, seized every opportunity to enjoy the sports of the neighbourhood. The tutor's daily visits to his pupil were paid at a period of the day when Cousin Reuben was usually absent from the Hall, shooting pheasants on the Squire's land, or riding with equal fearlessness and awkwardness after the Rumborough pack. Twice Felix Kinsman dined with him at Hardy Clissold's table, on each of which occasions Reuben, in offering the clergyman a civility,

came to grief. The first of these accidents emptied a cup of coffee over the victim's shirt-front; the second caused Felix to wince under the pain of an outraged corn, whilst he refrained from smiling openly at the innocent cause of his discomfort, who, after stumbling over the curate's feet, measured his own length on the carpet of Mrs. Porchester's drawing-room. In no degree ruffled by the fall, which was altogether due to his own clumsiness, Reuben had a good laugh whilst he lay on the carpet, and, having picked himself up, entreated Felix not to apologize for having thrown him down. "You did not hurt me at all, my dear sir, and a tumble is a thing I enjoy," the kindly fellow assured Felix, whose enjoyment of the joke would have been more complete if Reuben's feet had been of ordinary dimensions and weight. At church, also, Felix had seen Reuben in the Hall pew, keeping one eye on his prayer-book, and another on Ada, whose demeanour testified her total unconsciousness of her admirer's furtive watchfulness. There were, no

doubt, other occasions when Reuben and Felix came within sight of one another, or exchanged a few words; but till the day before the morning fixed for Reuben's return to town their intercourse had been so slight that Felix was rather surprised when the Squire's cousin entered his study to bid him farewell.

"I am off to-morrow, Mr. Kinsman, and have just dropped in to say good-bye," the visitor explained, in a voice whose loudness shook the little old-fashioned, diamond-paned window of the clergyman's study. "Return my call when you come to town. Don't drop in at the Internal Control, for I never see private friends at my office. I am no drone, sir, but do my duty to the country that employs me. 'Duty' is my motto. If every man of the Civil Service were of my mind, Mr. Dickens would not have written so sharply of the Circumlocution Offices. So, if you honour me with a call, pay it at my lodgings, 13, Manchester Street."

Having thanked Mr. Bloxham for his invi-

tation, Felix Kinsman expressed a proper sense of the courtesy exhibited by his visitor in coming to the parsonage to say good-bye.

"'Tisn't altogether an affair of politeness. I am here partly on business," Reuben replied.

"Indeed!"

"Can you spare me ten minutes?"

"Three times ten are at your service."

Looking round suspiciously at the doors and window of the snug study, the visitor inquired, "Are we safe from intrusion?"

"Quite," was the reply. "If any one knocks at the front door, I will have him shown into the parlour."

Reassured on this point, Reuben extended his right arm to its full length, and drawing the hand to his face, put a fore-finger on his lips—a piece of pantomime expressive of secrecy and admonition, which Mr. Bloxham was wont to perform in his office at moments when he desired to have the undivided and particular attention of any one conferring with him. The movement and gesture said, "Now, sir, be heedful, and look at my mouth, for

important words are about to proceed from it."

Felix Kinsman was duly impressed, and looked towards his companion with silent inquisitiveness.

"I am about to take you into my confidence, Mr. Kinsman, and tell you the secret of my existence—a secret, sir, of which I have hitherto had no sharer. No one suspects the matter that I am about to reveal to you."

Mr. Kinsman intimated his willingness to be the recipient of any confidences which it would be agreeable to Mr. Bloxham to impart to him.

"I have an object in view; and when I have an object in view, it is my custom to achieve it by frankness. That is my way of doing business at the Internal Control, where other men adopt a secret policy. And I find that frankness pays in the long run better than reserve."

Mr. Kinsman remarked that candour was sometimes the best diplomacy.

"Precisely," said Reuben. "But, mind you, you must be prepared for a surprise. I am going to startle you."

"I am quite ready for the shock."

Drawing himself up in his chair, Reuben Bloxham once again touched his lips with his right fore-finger, and remarked, "Don't breathe a word of this to any living creature but myself—I am in love with Ada Clissold."

The communication proved less startling to its recipient than Reuben thought it would be. Besides a scarcely perceptible smile that played for a moment over Felix Kinsman's handsome face, the revelation produced no outward effect whatever on the clergyman.

Putting the case yet more strongly, Reuben Bloxham repeated the pantomimic gesture, nodded his head, and observed, "I have been in love with her for years—ever since she was a little girl, and used to sit on my knee and pull my ears."

"'Pon my honour, Mr. Bloxham, you have not surprised me," Felix rejoined, with disappointing coolness.

"Then nothing will surprise you. You'd think it all in the ordinary way of life if a tame lion were to spring through that window, and lie down at your feet on the hearth-rug."

"Miss Clissold is so lovely and charming, that it seems to me quite natural for you and every other marriageable man of her acquaintance to be in love with her. You would have surprised me if you had said that you had no strong liking for her."

"And you are not surprised at my daring to love her?"

"Not at all."

"Continue to think of her while you look at me," Reuben rejoined, gesticulating rapidly with his forefinger, pointing with it to each of his most obvious personal defects. "Look at the bald patch on the top of my head, at my absurd face, round shoulders, lumbering body, preposterous legs, enormous feet. It was more through my misfortune than your fault that you tumbled me down in the drawing-room a

fortnight since. Look at me, take stock of me, and you must be surprised!"

Felix Kinsman was silent.

"There," Reuben exclaimed triumphantly, "you *are* astonished at my impudence. I knew you would be."

On being thus urged, Felix begged to be believed when he declared himself innocent of surprise and every kind of wonder.

"You are not a handsome man, Mr. Bloxham, but your looks are by no means so unprepossessing as you would have me think them."

"Don't try to palliate my defects with compliments," Reuben urged solemnly. "The attempt will be unsuccessful. I know my defects. A man of serious and sober nature, I am cursed with a comical visage—a face, Kinsman, so grotesque that everyone is more or less inclined to laugh at me on first making my acquaintance, until—until I force myself to assume a manner that constrains respect. In the way of awkwardness I am unique. I have no accomplishments. I was made of the

commonest clay, and nature fashioned me with her left hand, when she was looking backwards over her right shoulder. And yet I have the presumption to love Ada."

"You know the proverb about faint heart and fair lady. You know, also, the saying that a plain man is never, by reason of his plainness, more than five minutes behind a handsome man in the favour of woman-kind."

"That saying was first uttered by a vain ugly man."

"Pardon me, an extremely beautiful woman, who was always pursued by a crowd of masculine admirers, originated the remark."

"Then she said it to flatter a vain ugly man into good humour. But don't think that my sense of the absurdity of my presumption has rendered my passion a torture. Quite the reverse, Kinsman, I assure you. Bless you, man, my love has been the source of indescribable felicity to me. As I walk through the streets of London I look out for a house for myself and Ada, and when I have found

a suitable one, I turn my eyes up to its windows, persuade myself that it is mine, and that Ada is peeping through the drawing-room curtains to catch sight of me as I walk up the street from the Internal Control. Once when I was playing this foolish game, imagination carried me so far away that I actually knocked at the door of a house in Clarges Street, under the fancy that the dwelling was my own. I brought out the big, black-whiskered footman, whom I utterly confounded by saying, 'This is my house, but you are not my man. Mrs. Bloxham can't have hired you without consulting me.' Before the man recovered from his astonishment, and could reply, I had walked on and turned round the nearest corner. I discontinued my walks up and down Clarges Street; and next week I took another house in Queen Anne Street, Cavendish Square."

When he had laughed over Reuben's droll account of this mischance, Felix Kinsman said, "Have you given your cousin any intimation of your feelings towards her?"

"She is as ignorant of my passion as you were five minutes since."

"Why don't you speak to her?"

"Why does the timid little boy sit, knees and chin together, on the river's bank, delaying to take the plunge which he means to take for his pleasure?"

"Because he is afraid that the consequences of the plunge may not be altogether agreeable."

"Just so. And I don't like to take the plunge, because I am not certain that the consequences would be agreeable."

"Don't be faint-hearted."

"Must be. Don't you see she is my cousin. And a simple girl like Ada is apt never to suspect that her cousin has a heart, until she discovers that she has broken it."

After a pause, Felix Kinsman suggested delicately that perhaps they had pursued that topic far enough; had, in fact, talked about Ada rather more freely than they were justified in doing, though each of them cherished a chivalric respect for her.

Reuben Bloxham thought not. He had an

object in view, which it was impossible for him to achieve without talking about Ada and his love for her.

By silence, and an inoffensive look of impatience, Felix intimated that he wished Mr. Bloxham would hasten forward to the object of their strange conference.

The silence and look had the desired effect.

"I have taken you, Kinsman," he said, "into my confidence. You must respond with similar confidence."

Startled by this speech, and showing his surprise, Felix Kinsman considered for a few moments before he answered warily, "I will be frank with you on every matter about which you have any right to expect me to be communicative."

"I want you to be candid about an affair which you have every right to keep locked in your own breast. I have shown you my heart, and now I wish to look into yours."

These words brought up to the clergyman's face a flush which caused his inquisitor to entreat him not to be angry or offended.

"I am neither angry nor offended. But, at last, you *have* astonished me. What do you want to know?"

"*Your secret!*" was the answer, delivered with emphasis and loudness by Reuben Bloxham, who, on uttering the reply, leaned forward in his seat, and brought his droll face within three feet of his companion's eyes.

"My secret!" retorted the clergyman quickly, with perturbation manifest in his excited face. "What do you mean? What secret do you mean? *If* I have any secret, it is my own."

"It is mine also," the intruder responded quietly and emphatically.

Felix Kinsman's embarrassment increased. For half a minute he was perplexed, distressed, frightened by his companion's singular conduct. A cool observer of the scene would have inferred, from the clergyman's sudden display of unrest and alarm, that he was the guardian of a secret for whose safety he was in sharp, urgent anxiety—that he was fearful of some exposure that would cover him with humiliation.

Not unobservant of his companion's agitation, but altogether unaware of its vehemence and nature, Reuben Bloxham relieved him from his distress, even more quickly than he had occasioned it, by saying, "Kinsman, you are in love with Ada."

Of course this declaration of his discovery was rendered extraordinarily impressive by the pantomime that preluded the most momentous of Reuben's confidential statements.

The words, whilst abruptly terminating the clergyman's suspense and disturbance, brought a smile of amusement to his face.

"I have watched you, Kinsman, closely on the few occasions when we have met, and I have given due weight to all the circumstances of your position at the Hall. Lovers are quick at discovering their rivals, and I have found mine in you."

"In order that I may sooner ascertain the purpose of your examination of my affections, Mr. Bloxham, let us assume that you are right. Though I do not like to take a liberty with your cousin's name, you may for the moment

consider that I am Miss Clissold's passionate admirer. What then?"

"I withdraw my claims to her. I surrender all hope of winning her."

"You are generous enough to give her up to me?"

"There's no generosity in my course. I retire from the struggle, recognizing the hopelessness of my suit, since you are in the field."

"You can't mean what you say?"

Emotion made itself felt in the honest fellow's voice as he answered,

"'Pon my honour I do. Don't think me a poor-spirited coward for giving in to you without a fight. I am not without proper pride, and self-respect, and all that kind of thing. But I know that nature has not made men equal, and that you are so far superior to me that in a contest for Ada's hand I should be no match for you. If it were a question of contract or accounts at the Internal Control, I should be the better man; but in a race for a woman's hand I should have no chance against you. So, since you wish for Ada,

you had better take her unopposed; for Ada cares just so much for Cousin Reuben that she would be unhappy at thinking herself the cause of misery to him. I have thought it all out; and now you see the object of my call."

"But why, Bloxham, should Miss Clissold love either of us?" Felix Kinsman asked. "As you are pleased to think so, I can suppose myself more likely than you to captivate her. But why are you so confident of my ability to win her?"

"She can't help falling in love with you, if you continue to see as much of her as you *have* seen of her during the last few months. All your accomplishments are the very arts which she esteems. You sing and play superbly; Ada is no grand pianiste herself, but she delights in music. She is an art amateur; and Truelock tells me that in water-colours you could beat half the regular artists. Her devotion to her brother is, perhaps, the strongest of her affections; and she sees you daily contributing to his happiness. She is a

young, ardent girl; you are a remarkably good-looking man. She is of woman-kind; you are an eloquent priest, whose voice, as Ada and Jemmy agree, is as soft and rich as sacred music."

Whilst Reuben Bloxham enumerated the forces which would make Ada an easy prey to his companion's blandishments, Felix Kinsman watched him closely; and there was observable in the clergyman's face an expression of enlightenment and conviction that betrayed at the same time surprise at and agreement with his companion's representations.

"You have reposed confidence in me, Mr. Bloxham," he said in reply to the words that had so obviously affected him, "and I will repay it with corresponding candour. You are quite in error in suspecting that I love Miss Clissold."

"What! you don't love her?"

"I admire her cordially, but my feelings towards the young lady are not of the kind that you imagine. I neither love, nor am I ever likely to wish to make her my wife. Yet

further, I should think it a calamity for myself and her if she were ever to conceive a desire to be my wife. I am greatly impressed by what you say respecting the possibility of so great a misfortune; and bearing in mind the danger to which you have drawn my attention, I will avoid it, and preserve the young lady from it, by circumspect conduct."

"I don't suspect you of trifling with me," Reuben rejoined, "but the surprise of finding that after all you are not my rival renders it difficult for me to realize and believe in my good fortune."

"Be well assured of what you are pleased to call your good fortune. I am not your rival in her affections. So far as they are concerned, it is absolutely impossible that I can ever become your competitor."

"She may be mine after all," Reuben Bloxham exclaimed exultingly, as he closed his fists and beat a tattoo with them on both his knees.

"'Pon my honour, sir," Felix Kinsman rejoined, "I hope that you may not be disap-

pointed. Your dealing with me has been eccentric; but its honourableness and unselfishness satisfy me that, if Miss Clissold were to accept your suit, she would be confiding in a man deserving of her condescension, and qualified to make her happy."

"You'll befriend my suit?"

"It would be presumption in me to speak as though I had any power to contribute to its success; but you may be sure Miss Clissold will never hear from my lips a single word calculated to lower you in her regard."

"It's very good of you to say so, Kinsman," ejaculated Ada's admirer, extending the right hand, which his companion was not slow to grasp cordially.

"Anyhow," observed Felix Kinsman, with a humorous and genial smile, "our interview will not dispose you to think less highly of your favourite policy. Your candour has, at least, dispelled a painful misconception, and made us friends."

As the hour for dinner at the Hall was close at hand, Reuben Bloxham left the parsonage

without further delay; and when his visitor had taken his departure, Felix Kinsman sat before his study fire, meditating on all that had transpired, and giving particular heed to Reuben Bloxham's cautionary words. As the flickering firelight played upon his bookshelves and the walls of his darkening room, he thought how culpable he would be if, through his remissness, Ada were to conceive for him a love which he could not return. "Bloxham's seasonable warning," he said to himself, "has put me on my guard—shown me a peril and a duty that had not occurred to me. He is an honest, kindly fellow, as unselfish as he is uncouth. But *if* Truelock enters the lists against him, there will be no great chance of success for so comical a knight. Love seems to have blinded him to his most apparent danger. But perhaps he could prove my suspicions respecting Truelock to be as groundless as his own jealous suspicions of me were. Why do I wish that it might be so? Truelock is my dear friend: Bloxham is, at most, an eccentric acquaintance, whom I am beginning to like; Ada is a prize

the acquisition of which would make either of them happy. Why then would I rather have the prize fall to Bloxham than to Truelock? Is it possible that my affection for Truelock is engendering jealousy? No, no; it cannot be. Even a woman would be incapable of such mean jealousy. Am I a man, and, by my manhood, superior to feminine weaknesses and spites?"

CHAPTER X.

JEMMY CLISSOLD LAYS ASIDE HIS "STEEL
THINGUMMIES."

WITHOUT producing many events worthy of special commemoration in this or any other history, the next ten months afforded our friends at Sunningwold an average number of such incidents and diversions as their circumstances were likely to yield to them. The Squire gained another Smithfield prize, and discharged, with his usual efficiency, the duties devolving upon him as sportsman, landlord, and magistrate. Noel Truelock worked in his studio, rode with the Rumborough fox-hounds, went out fishing once in a while with Felix Kinsman, and in the April of 1867 sent to the

Royal Academy the three pictures—"Iphigenia," and two smaller performances—that won the approval of connoisseurs in the following month, and caused Mr. Ferret to congratulate himself on having spoken plainly to the no longer indolent painter. Persevering in her special path of virtue, Mrs. Porchester built a new fowl-house at the hennery. Labouring zealously in his sphere of usefulness, the Reverend Felix Kinsman grew yet more in favour with his flock; and, whilst rendering due service to his parishioners, he found time for the pleasures of familiar intercourse with his special friend at Bridgeham Rookery. Jemmy worked at his lessons; Ada at her music and painting.

Twice during those ten months Reuben Bloxham ran down from town to Sunningwold, and spent a few days with his relatives, who were wont to look for his presence in their quarters at Christmas, Easter, and in the Autumn. But neither at Christmas nor Easter did aught transpire between him and Ada to change the character of their intimacy. Fear-

ful of dissipating fond illusions by a premature declaration, though far from satisfied with the excitements of silent devotion, he persisted in the cautious and tardy operations that he hoped would result in her capitulation when he should at length call upon her to surrender. Still certain that his passion for his cousin was known only to himself and Felix Kinsman, Reuben hugged the secret which nearly every member of Ada's circle possessed. But to the one person whom he had taken into his confidence, he became abundantly communicative, not to say garrulous, respecting his romantic hopes and anxieties. He would not frighten her; he would not pluck the fruit before it was ripe. He would wait and watch. He would delay the last appeal till his expected elevation in the Civil Service should make him rich enough to marry. At the same time, he would keep his eye on the young lady, so that, if any person threatened to snatch away the coveted prize, he might act with promptitude, and defeat the intruder's purpose. Such was the substance of the confidential state-

ments which Reuben made to Felix Kinsman at Christmas and Easter.

Though the clergyman had resolved to rid his heart of jealousy, and allow no paltry grudging to vex his mind, whilst he watched the growth of Ada's influence over Noel Truelock, it cannot be recorded that he carried out his purpose. Not that he exhibited any disposition to depreciate the merits of the young lady in whom the artist, without assuming the character of her suitor, continued to take a cordial interest. Even Noel Truelock could not discover that his intimacy with Ada occasioned Felix Kinsman dissatisfaction. But it is certain that the thought of seeing Hardy Clissold's daughter become the first object of Noel Truelock's affections was so far unpleasant to the Curate of Sunningwold, that he would have secretly exulted over any incidents favourable to Reuben Bloxham's hopes. That Miss Clissold would sooner or later become Mrs. Bloxham or Mrs. Truelock, Felix Kinsman was confident; and though neither Reuben nor Ada was a first object of his con-

cern, he was far more desirous that she should give herself to her cousin than that she should establish herself at Bridgeham Rookery.

But whilst thus certain that the one or the other of his two friends would wed Ada, Felix Kinsman was mindful of Reuben Bloxham's warning, and, instead of encouraging her disposition to treat him with sisterly familiarity, did his utmost to keep their intercourse within the limits of mere acquaintanceship. Though the terms on which he had been received at Sunningwold Hall, and the cordiality displayed to him by the Squire's family and friends, would have justified him in assuming towards the daughter of the house all the privileges of old friendship, he was careful never to address her by her Christian name. Though it was invariably courteous, and marked by gentlemanlike considerateness, his demeanour to her was studiously conventional. At times it was distant, and even frigidly formal. He declined to take part in the sketching excursions which Noel and Ada made in the neighbourhood of Sunningwold, on

the plea that he could not spare time for them, but really because he wished to avoid occasions of dangerous intimacy with his pupil's sister. Though Ada repeatedly solicited him to read poetry to her, whilst she worked with her brush in the park, or in her painting-room, he never gratified her desire to hear Tennyson's melodious verse delivered by his rich and dexterous voice. As soon as she appeared on the scene at the close of Jemmy's hours of lessons, the tutor repressed her advances without seeming to check them, avoided her overtures for social gossip without appearing to notice them; in fact, kept her at a distance, without violating politeness or offending her pride.

"Your tutor is a strange man, Jemmy," Ada observed, with delicious simplicity, when Mr. Kinsman had a minute before eluded one of her attempts to draw him outside the barrier of his peculiar reserve. "He always has an excuse for keeping away from me. He is very kind and friendly to me; but he never does anything I want him to do, except teach and be kind to you."

But though Felix Kinsman was very conscientious and honourable in thus attempting to preserve Ada from the misery and shame of a mistake, which in his heart he did not think her at all likely to make, I am disposed to imagine that his well-intentioned conduct was more calculated to stimulate her interest in him than to weaken it—that the very measures which he used to keep his influence over her at a minimum were in some degree accountable for the dangerous fervour of her liking for him. So long as he continued to officiate as her brother's tutor, and as the Curate of Sunningwold, it was impossible for Felix Kinsman to place her outside the limits of his personal influence, or to render his mental and moral endowments otherwise than greatly effective upon her sympathetic nature. Every Sunday she heard him read the sacred offices of her church, and deliver sermons not more remarkable for lucidity of demonstration and artful simplicity of diction than for the stirring fervour and fascinating music of their utterance. She could not enter a cottage on her father's

estate without hearing commendations of the preacher. Her father, Mrs. Porchester, Noel Truelock, every person whose judgment she had been taught to respect, combined to extol him. And daily this clergyman, so beloved by the poor, so admired by the rich, so beautiful in his person and life, and so gracious to all who approached him—increased the debt which Ada conceived herself to owe him, by the tenderness and affectionate assiduity of his services to her afflicted brother. Under these circumstances, it was impossible for Felix Kinsman to diminish greatly the effect of the powers which, he had been warned, would make Ada his enthusiastic admirer. It was strange that so sagacious and thoroughly honest a man as Felix Kinsman could hope to avoid painful embarrassments, and keep his influence over Ada within safe bounds, by being rather less cordial to her than he was to other persons.

The number of Hardy Clissold's family, in whom the earlier months of 1867 were most productive of increase, was Jemmy; and it cannot be said that the change was favourable

to the hopes of those who wished to see him outgrow his physical infirmities. The coldness of the Winter affected the boy prejudicially, depriving him of nervous energy, and occasioning him an illness that confined him to his bed for several days. And when he rallied from the attack, so as to be able to resume his readings with Felix Kinsman and his ordinary ways of life, it was obvious to the few persons who regarded him with solicitude and critical attention, that the transient indisposition had seriously diminished his recuperative powers. His mind was not less active, his fortitude was in no way diminished; but the languor and feebleness of his limbs were more distressingly apparent. His countenance was more frail and alarmingly delicate, and, though he was not deserted by his habitual cheerfulness, there was a tell-tale thinness in his laughter, a significant sadness in his smile, that justified the secret forebodings of dispassionate spectators of his case.

Ada saw the alteration, though, even whilst on her knees praying for the preservation of

her brother's existence—so valueless to him, and so precious to her,—she strove to look away from it. Felix Kinsman was alive to the change, and held his silence when Noel True-lock remarked, "Poor boy, he will go away from us, I am afraid, before he has lived to be a man."

Perhaps the only person who did not recognize the alteration for the worse was Hardy Clissold, who maintained stoutly that his boy was progressing excellently well, had grown as strong and hearty as a lad need be, and, thanks to Mr. Kinsman, would grow to be one of the cleverest scholars in the county. But though the Squire talked in this strain to his tenants and other neighbours, I think that even he was at heart less confident and hopeful than he declared himself to be. Simple, truth-loving, sterling folk are sometimes strangely clever at deceiving themselves, all the while knowing that they are self-deceivers. The father's inability to see what was obvious to every other member of his

household may have been a kind of voluntary blindness.

"Jemmy is not so strong as he was last Spring," Ada remarked mournfully to Felix Kinsman one bright April morning.

"Indeed? I have never before seen him in the Spring. He tells me that it is the season of the year in which he has always suffered most."

"He does not work too hard, does he?"

"I am careful to make his work light and entertaining."

"I know you do," said Ada, her eyes filling with tears of gratitude, which, had the tutor seen them, would have made him force the conversation to a less mournful topic.

To soothe the girl's apprehension, and with no wish to call attention to his own merits, Felix Kinsman observed,

"You may rely on me, Miss Clissold, to be very considerate for him, and to take care that he does not exert himself too much."

"I do rely on you; we all rely on you," Ada answered warmly to an assurance which made her fear that her inquiry had implied a lack of trust in the tutor's discretion.

"Thank you. I am always observant of Jemmy's symptoms, and when he is more than usually weak, our 'lessons' are little more than a two hours' gossip, in which I am more desirous to withdraw his mind from his studies than bent on encouraging him to pursue them."

Unconsciously holding out her tiny right hand, whilst she turned the gaze of her burning violet eyes up to her companion's tranquil, handsome, severely-set face, Ada said,

"Your kindness to Jemmy, Mr. Kinsman, makes me very grateful to you. I used to be his 'stick,' but he has discarded me. At least he never leans on me when you are in the way to help him."

"Of course not. I am stronger than you; and he prefers a stout staff to a polished wand."

"No, no, it is not that. And yet you

are right. He likes to lean on your *strong* mind."

The girl paused for a few moments, and then the discovery of a fresh sad truth, and the finer significance of her own words flashing upon her, she added, with melancholy pathos,

"Your strong mind is his staff. Be near him, Mr. Kinsman, and let him lean upon it in the dark valley of death's shadow."

Taking the girl's hand gently—for her sudden alarm of grief was so likely to overpower her, that for the moment he forgot caution and prudence—Felix Kinsman said slowly,

"When he journeys through that valley, Miss Clissold, I hope that I may be by his side—not to comfort and encourage him, for he will need no human comforter—not that he may lean on my weak intellect, for he will have in his hand a far stronger staff."

Twenty seconds after the utterance of this speech, Felix Kinsman was alone in the room where Ada had spoken with him. He was alone, and looking at the closed door through

which the girl had retreated hastily, after touching his hand with her lips, and dropping two tears upon it. The act of homage and gratitude resulted from so pure a motive, was performed by so pure a creature, that its doer, on regaining her ordinary composure, reflected upon her impulsive conduct with satisfaction unalloyed by shame.

But the incident caused Felix Kinsman no little alarm and regret. He upbraided himself for having been deficient in discretion and self-control. He ought not to have taken her hand; he should have spoken to her less sympathetically. The affair should be a lesson to him. Never again would he betray the good, simple, trustful girl into such an exhibition of feeling.

"Yes," he mused, when he had done scolding himself, "Reuben Bloxham was right. I could win her love, if I were capable of perpetrating a prodigious villainy. But she is safe in my hands. I may be a wicked, impious, horrible mockery of sacerdotal goodness, but I am no scoundrel! Circumstances

have drawn me into evil, but I am still at heart my own true self."

A few days after this interview with Ada respecting her brother's health, Felix Kinsman was spoken to on the same subject by Mrs. Porchester, who encountered him in the Hall gardens, on her return from her fowl-yard.

"I have been speaking with Dr. Scotchmer," said the lady, "who thinks that Jemmy is losing ground."

"He does not think there is imminent danger?"

"Danger is always imminent in such a case as Jemmy's," returned the lady; "but Dr. Scotchmer sees no reason for alarm. Still, he is uneasy about the dear boy, and wishes for a second opinion."

"Indeed!"

"So I have arranged that Dr. Fisher is to come over from Needham Regis next week, when Mr. Clissold will be away from Sunningwold for two or three days. Hardy is rather unreasonable on questions affecting the boy. He might object to Dr. Scotchmer's

proposal; or if he permitted me to send for Dr. Fisher, he might be immoderately frightened by our wish for another opinion."

"Then you do not mean to tell him you have sent for the physician from Needham Regis?" Felix Kinsman inquired.

"Precisely so," replied Mrs. Porchester, nodding her head with an air of mystery. "He is to know nothing of Dr. Fisher's visit. I mention the arrangement to you, so that, on Hardy's return from Dallinghoo Hall, you may not reveal to him what has been done in his absence."

"Is there any need for me to caution Jemmy to keep Dr. Fisher's visit from his father's knowledge?"

"None at all."

"I am glad of that."

"Jemmy never speaks to his father about his health, and he will not know of the reserve—the innocent reserve—which it is incumbent on me to maintain towards Mr. Clissold about the doctor's visit."

Having made this communication, Mrs. Por-

chester sighed. Having sighed, she remarked,

"Deception is so foreign to my nature, Mr. Kinsman, that I experience pain in withholding from Mr. Clissold this arrangement. Such reserve savours of deception, and I am by nature so frank and averse to secretness, that it costs me a struggle to have recourse to a policy of concealment. If, on his return from Dallinghoo, Hardy should hear of Dr. Fisher's visit, I shall tell him that the doctor was not sent for, but happening to be on his way through Sunningwold, called at the Hall out of politeness."

Forbearing to offer any opinion on the morality of the lady's conduct, Felix Kinsman hoped that Dr. Fisher's opinion would diminish her anxiety.

"I hope so," said Mrs. Porchester, with a slight catching of the breath, that was meant to do duty for a sigh, "not for my sake, but for my cousin's sake, and dear Ada's sake."

"At times it strikes me, Mrs. Porchester, that it would be better for Mr. Clissold if he could be induced to recognize the very delicate, if not

critical, state of Jemmy's health. Should the dear boy die,—”

Mrs. Porchester gave a little start, and raised her hands deprecatingly, before she interposed, “There is no need for us to entertain that anticipation at present.”

Without noticing the interruption, Felix Kinsman continued, “The blow will be all the heavier to Mr. Clissold, because he has not been prepared for it. If to the last he shuts his eyes to the signs of his son's weakness and fragility, Jemmy's death may prove a crushing blow to him.”

“You are quite right, Mr. Kinsman. Should Jemmy die, it will be a terrible blow to his father—a terrible blow! And it will devolve on me to soothe him, cheer him, strengthen him! I foresee the gloom and blackness of the future. But I am not unnerved by the prospect. When the evil days shall arrive, they will find me at my cousin's side, more alert than ever to sacrifice myself for his welfare.”

Felix Kinsman was not agreeably impressed by Mrs. Porchester's words. Her tone was still

less pleasant to him. There was something in it which indicated that she was coolly watching events, and calculating chances, instead of regarding Jemmy's condition with disinterested concern and womanly pity. It made Felix Kinsman suspect that she had sent for Dr. Fisher, out of no concern for the invalid, but for the satisfaction of her curiosity and the encouragement of her private hopes. It implied that she wished to know if "anything was going to happen to Jemmy," and whether she might calculate on something happening in the course of a few months.

In due course Dr. Fisher arrived at the Hall, during Hardy Clissold's absence, and made a careful examination of the feeble boy. The physician had the reputation of being a skilful stethoscopist, and he did his best to learn through his stethoscope the state of the invalid's heart and lungs. Dr. Scotchmer was suspicious of mischief in those organs; mischief that would quickly destroy the life. The examination completed, Dr. Fisher, after the fashion of physicians and other wise men, when in

doubt, shook his head oracularly, and spoke the common forms of encouragement to the patient. He told Mrs. Porchester privately that, though his stethoscope confirmed Dr. Scotchmer's diagnosis in many particulars, he was not disposed to take the family doctor's despondent view of the case. There was certainly a weak point at the base of Jemmy's left lung. The boy's heart was not a strong organ; it was not a healthy organ. Six months hence, Dr. Fisher would most likely be in a position to speak more precisely respecting the symptoms that had caused Mr. Scotchmer uneasiness. With perfect truth Mrs. Porchester confessed that she had hoped to receive more definite information from the physician. She was ready to make any sacrifice for the dear boy's good; but she would be glad to obtain information which should free her from anxious doubt, even though it should preclude her from the consolation of hope. Six months hence her almost maternal concern for Jemmy would probably cause her to consult Dr. Fisher again.

Always better in the warmer than the cold

seasons, Jemmy gained strength and animation as the Spring joined hands with Summer. June saw him in what unscientific observers thought average health for a boy of his infirm frame. Perhaps he was something thinner than he had been a year since; but he was growing fast, and therefore his slightness and tenuity were natural. He continued to work at Sallust and Cæsar, and was very proud of his progress in the Greek Testament. Between the opening of July and the end of October he read half a score of novels, made several fishing expeditions with his tutor, and, amusing himself in the old ways, seemed to enjoy his amusements as much as heretofore.

But in November an accidental exposure in a rain-storm gave him a cold that seized the weak point of his lungs, and set in quick, destructive action the latent mischief which Dr. Scotchmer had detected in the previous Spring. The gentry of the neighbourhood called the malady "pulmonary affection" and "tubercular disease." The villagers of Sunningwold termed it "galloping consumption."

"I have done with Latin and Greek, Mr. Kinsman," the boy remarked faintly to his tutor, when his doctors had confessed that no human skill could stay the progress of his disease, "at least in this world."

"Yes, Jemmy," Felix Kinsman answered, "our work with Latin and Greek books is over. But there is one book which we will continue to study."

"You will read it to me in English—the Psalms and the Gospels, and explain them to me."

"I will do my best to explain them," Felix Kinsman answered tenderly, and with pathetic humbleness; "but I am no fit teacher for you. Oh! Jemmy, I wish that I were wiser, more learned, less unworthy to be your companion!"

For a minute the sick boy was astonished and perplexed by the sadness and fervour of the clergyman's ejaculation. Who could be more worthy to prepare him for the grave than the reverend teacher who sat beside him? But Jemmy's surprise passed away

when he referred the clergyman's words to his Christian meekness.

"You know, sir," Jemmy observed, consenting to rather than combating the curate's lowly estimate of his qualifications, "you will only have to comfort me, and remind me of truths which I have already received. For years I have been looking forward to what is about to happen to me in a few days."

"And whilst looking forward to death, you have prepared yourself for it. Thank Heaven, you are prepared for it!"

"This illness is no surprise to me."

"Indeed?"

"Last winter, when the cold struck me down, I felt that I had entered on my last year. I knew that I should rally in the Spring, enjoy another Summer and Autumn, and then—die."

"You never told me so."

A flush came to the boy's beautiful face as he extended his small, thin, white hand, and said,

"I could not tell you—I did not like to make you unhappy."

But I need not dwell upon this scene, nor mention other scenes of similar tenderness and simplicity that occurred during Jemmy's last weeks in this world. My readers, I am thankful to say, may be left to imagine for themselves the incidents of an illness during whose brief course the sufferer displayed to the last, by delicate words and apt looks, the gentleness and fortitude and considerateness of his brave and docile nature. For themselves they can picture golden-haired Ada sitting, hour after hour, at the foot of her dying brother's bed; listening to his serious, affectionate, dutiful discourse with his spiritual adviser; responding to his smiles with looks of fondness and resignation, if not of contentment; watching the feminine tenderness with which Felix Kinsman soothed and caressed the languishing patient; taking into her soul the melody of the rich, solemn, subtle intonations with which the clergyman read from time to time passages of Scripture. They do not need to be told how Hardy Clissold, consenting at length to see

the grim conclusion of truths to which he had obstinately shut his eyes for years, walked silently under the burden of grief that blanched his cheek and bowed his frame. Nor will I pause to speak of the mysterious silence of the hushed house, or of the perfect propriety with which Mrs. Porchester played her sympathetic and self-sacrificial part.

The end came one cold, bright January morning, when Sunningwold Park was covered thickly with snow, that sparkled with prismatic splendour under the glorious sun.

It came—as endings are wont to do—suddenly at last.

Felix Kinsman occupied his usual seat near the patient's pillow, Ada was sitting near the bed's foot, when Jemmy woke up from a light slumber, and, raising himself to a sitting posture, stretched forth his hands to his sister. A strangely expressive smile animated his face—a smile that called her to hasten to him for a last kiss.

Ere he gave the kiss, the dying boy looked steadily into her burning, violet eyes, and said,

"Ada, dear Ada, I go! You will soon come to me!"

When he had so spoken, and kissed her, Jemmy turned quickly, and with an effort—astonishing to those who beheld it and knew his extreme weakness—threw his arms round Felix Kinsman's neck.

"Oh! kiss me before I go!" the boy said quickly to his tutor. "I have no mother to kiss me; and I am dark and faint."

Kissing the dying lad on the lips and on the eyelids, Felix Kinsman placed him gently back upon his pillows, and, with a glance, signed to Ada to approach. It was the clergyman's design to retire a pace or two from the bed, and make room for Ada to stand near the boy's head. But ere he could accomplish his object, Jemmy said, softly and earnestly,

"Mr. Kinsman, give my love to p^{er}a; and, dear Mr. Kinsman, be kind to Ada—she will miss me so."

These words were followed by a smile that rested on Jemmy's face after his spirit had ascended to the brighter world.

Yes, the end had come.

Jemmy had left the world for whose hard ways he was ill-fitted, the old home in which he had suffered for more than fourteen years, the sister whose love had been to him a living poem, the wretched body that had been to him a prison and a rack. Yes, Hardy Clissold, the end has come, and your boy has thrown aside his "steel thingummies," outgrown his weaknesses, and become as strong as other boys—in Heaven!

CHAPTER XI.

NOEL TRUELOCK UNDERTAKES A DELICATE
MISSION.

THE passions and sympathies of the soul are so intimately and delicately related to each other, that to rouse one of them always stirs another, and sometimes excites moral forces with which it may appear to superficial observers to have no immediate connection. Joy is so apt to occasion grief, despair to engender hope, resentment to generate pity, that the observer, unacquainted with the rudiments of psychology, is often astonished by the quickness with which men pass from mirth to despondency, from gloom to cheerfulness, from anger to compassion. In many natures

fear is a prelude to courage, selfish emotion the forerunner of generous impulse. The gratitude, with which a weak and profoundly afflicted woman regards the man who alleviates her distress and soothes her apprehensions, is very often the parent of love. It was so with Ada Clissold. Before her brother's last illness she had regarded Felix Kinsman with the admiration and affectionate allegiance which gentle English girls usually cherish for eloquent preachers, under whose influence they have fallen. It was during a period of sharp tribulation that she learnt to love the clergyman, to whose care her brother's last words had commended her.

It may not be inferred that, whilst the shadow of death covered her, and the bed on which her brother's lifeless form reposed, she was aware of the change that had taken place in her regard for Felix Kinsman. She was too completely overpowered by her recent calamity to think of herself, or to look beyond the terrible day when Jemmy's lovely face would be withdrawn from her gaze, and his coffin would

be reverently carried to Sunningwold Church. And several days—several weeks—had elapsed since Jemmy's funeral, ere she discovered how entirely she had given her heart to the man to whom she, even more than the dead, had looked for solace and support whilst the night of the grave closed over them.

After the funeral Felix Kinsman discontinued his daily visits to the Hall. The pupil and the teacher's office were gone; and henceforth the clergyman would only appear at Mr. Clissold's house in compliance with the demands and usages of neighbourliness. He would still be Hardy Clissold's intimate friend, and a frequent guest at the Squire's table. Perhaps he would call on Mrs. Porchester once a week—would dine at the Hall once a fortnight. Ada would also encounter him once in a while in the village, and hear his name mentioned by Noel Truelock. She would have the delight of hearing him read service and preach twice every Sunday. But this was not enough for Ada. She pined for Felix Kinsman's companionship—to see him daily, to talk with him

about her brother in heaven, to win comfort and goodness from him. Soon she discovered that life would be for ever colourless, blank, unendurably wretched to her, if she were doomed to pass it in a state of separation from him. This discovery led to another, that filled her with shame and self-aborrence. If she could not endure the prospect of a life spent away from the clergyman, if she required him for her daily, hourly companion, it was obvious to her that she loved him; and as this revelation burst upon her, she regarded her condition with dismay, scorn, loathing. Her brother so recently dead, not buried a month, even yet one of the newest of heaven's angels; and was she already in the fever and tempest of love for his tutor? Was she so heartless, unwomanly, unnatural, that grief for her lost brother was already in her heart a sentiment weaker than romantic, jealous passion for a living man? More horrible still, had she actually conceived her desire for Felix Kinsman, learnt to love him, invited his love, in the very chamber of death,

whilst she was feigning to harbour no thought but concern for her dying brother?

With more of cruelty than justice to herself, Ada answered these questions in the affirmative. And, in the agonies occasioned by contempt of herself, and disgustful shame at what she regarded as her enormous and sacrilegious wickedness, she threw herself upon the sofa of her private room, and covering her face with her hands, wept bitterly and violently. She was discovered in this paroxysm of grief by Mrs. Porchester, who vainly strove to pacify her by assuring her that, instead of indulging her disposition for melancholy brooding over her bereavement, she should force herself to be cheerful, and sacrifice her own feelings for the sake of her father, who would never be reconciled to the loss of his son so long as he saw his daughter inconsolable.

From the day when she became aware of her love for Felix Kinsman, Ada shrank from the approach of the man she loved. Instead of hastening to see him when he called, she remained in her private apartment, or slipped

out to the park for a walk, so that he might not be drawn to an interview with her. At church, where religious duty sanctioned the enjoyment, she rested her eyes on his face, and drew into her soul the music of his voice; but she no longer, on leaving church after celebration of divine service, solicited smile or spoken greeting from him by a kindly glance. If she thought that he was about to look at her, she turned her eyes away from him. When Felix Kinsman dined at the Hall, which he did about once in every ten days, it did not escape Mrs. Porchester's lady-like vigilance that Ada's bearing to him was no longer marked by cordiality and frankness; that, on the contrary, it was expressive of constraint and fear. Nor was Mrs. Porchester slow to remark that, whilst Ada exhibited an unaccountable coldness and formality to the clergyman, he displayed towards the girl none of the tenderness and sympathetic trust which he might be presumed to cherish for his old pupil's sister.

On this point Mrs. Porchester's observations

of the curate's demeanour agreed with Ada Clissold's sense of an alteration in his treatment of her. Truth to tell, though he had no suspicion of the state of Ada's feelings towards him, Felix Kinsman, in the execution of his considerate purpose, had decided to withdraw from the dangerous familiarity with her into which the circumstances of Jemmy's last illness had led him. Without imagining that Ada either loved him, or was on the point of loving him, he was resolved to retreat from a position which might result in an embarrassment that he was particularly desirous to avoid. As soon, therefore, as the first agitations consequent upon Jemmy's death had subsided, he retired abruptly from relations which made him the girl's especially confidential companion, and resumed his previous character of her polite and deferential, but at the same time studiously formal, acquaintance.

Acutely sensible of this change in Felix Kinsman's behaviour to her, Ada attributed it to altogether wrong motives. She imagined

that he had detected her secret feeling for him, and, instead of being flattered by it, regarded her affection as a reason for holding aloof from her. She believed him to be cognizant of her passion, and seriously displeased by it—sorrowful for her weakness, and sadly disdainful of the levity that allowed her to think of love when she had scarcely put on mourning for her dead brother.

Under the agitation of grief for her brother, contempt for herself, and a hopeless passion, Ada's health gave way. Hardy Clissold's entreaties that she would find heart to cheer her old father, Mrs. Porchester's solicitations, the sympathy of friends, failed to dispel the gloom which incessantly covered her. In vain Noel Truelock exhorted her to resume her artistic work. No, she could not obey him; she had neither the will nor the strength to use brush or pencil. Reuben Bloxham's clumsy condolence and almost inarticulate demonstrations were so distasteful to her, that the poor fellow scarcely dared to approach her,

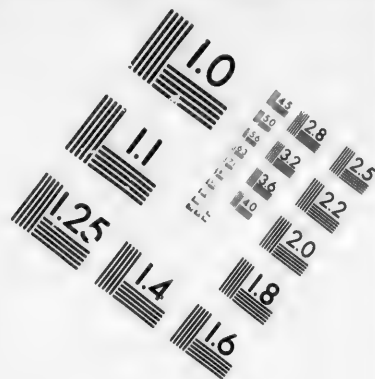
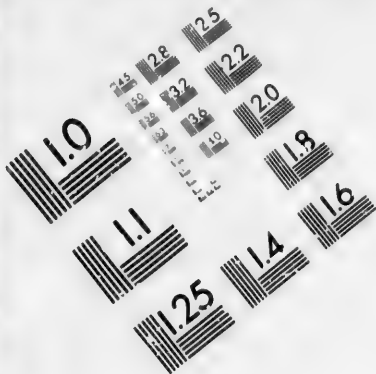
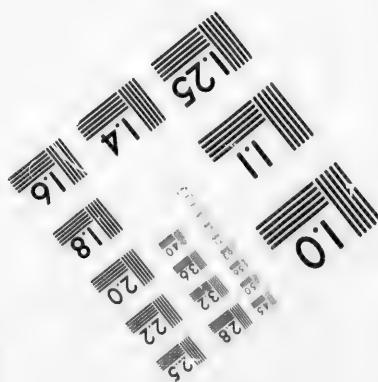
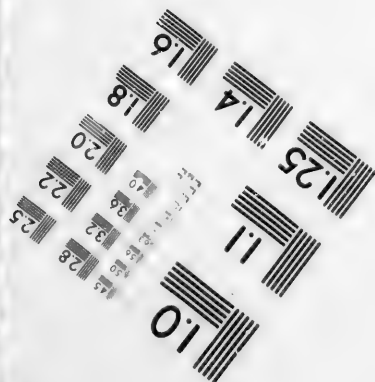
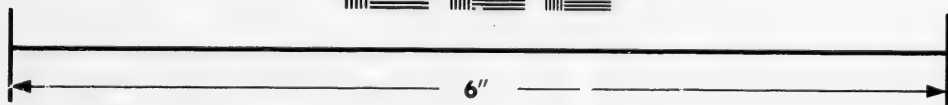
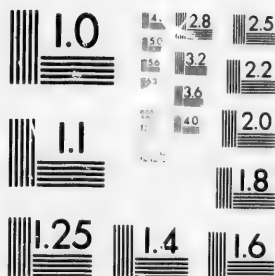


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when he came down to Sunningwold for his Easter holiday.

For hours together she would sit in speechless dejection. No longer the gentle girl, of whose evenness of temper and unvarying amiability her father used to boast, she grew to be pettish and irritable when well-meaning friends urged her to combat her immoderate woe. Dr. Scotchmer was consulted, and when he had found the impotency of steel and quinine and stimulants in her perplexing case, he had recourse to his "second opinion." Dr. Fisher suggested to Mrs. Porchester that some mental trouble, besides melancholy consequent on her brother's death, was the cause of the girl's obstinate dejection. Mrs. Porchester promised to watch the invalid narrowly. In the meantime Dr. Fisher recommended change of scene. The young lady had better leave home for a few months. If she went to London, Sir Millisent Harrowby of Savile Row should be invited to prescribe for her. A trip to North Wales would yield her diversion and the stimulant of a bracing atmosphere.

A month at Brighton, before she returned to Sunningwold, might be beneficial.

Acting on this advice, Hardy Clissold and Mrs. Porchester carried her away from scenes that had ceased to afford her happiness. But the distractions of London, the air of Scarborough, the scenery of North Wales, and the breezes of the Brighton cliffs, effected no improvement in the sufferer. After the fall of the leaf she returned to Sunningwold somewhat paler and thinner, but otherwise the same as she was in early Summer. "Good God!" the squire moaned, "am I to lose her too? If so, let me follow her." The tone of this plaint, so free from rebellious irritation, and so eloquent of the speaker's desire, alarmed Maria Porchester, who had learnt Ada's secret from the muttered words of troublous dreams. And in her fear lest Ada's death should result in the fulfilment of the Squire's mournful supplication, Mrs. Porchester sacrificed her sense of womanly honour for her cousin Hardy's good, and told him what she had ascertained from fretful speeches and pas-

sionate words, spoken by Ada in the unconsciousness of slumber, or during brief fits of delirious confusion.

"The cause of Ada's illness, Hardy, is love."

"Love? Who told you so, Maria?"

"She herself,—Ada."

"*She* told you?"

"But without knowing that she told me. Perhaps a woman ought not to reveal the secrets of one of her own sex, picked up little by little from her unintended words and involuntary mutterings. But I am, in all senses but one, Ada's mother, and in that character I may honourably speak to you about her revelations. It costs me an effort, a sense of treachery to do so; but when the happiness of those dear to me has been at stake, I have never—never—"

"Quite true, Maria,—true as gospel," interposed Hardy Clissold. "You have always been ready to sacrifice yourself."

"It is all due, Hardy, to my early training."

"But whom does she love?—Reuben Bloxham?"

Mrs. Porchester shook her head.

"Noel Truelock? He is a widower, with children. But he is a good fellow; I could not say 'no' to him."

Again Mrs. Porchester shook her head.

"Then," exclaimed the Squire, raising his voice, and sending forth an angry flash from beneath his beetling brows, "who the deuce has been making love to the girl without my leave?—who has dared to trifle with my darling's heart?" Hardy Clissold very rarely swore; but on the present occasion he added, "D—— me, Maria, tell me outright, or you'll make me swear."

"I am sure that no one has abused your hospitality by trifling with Ada's affections; and yet I am sure that Ada is in love with a gentleman who, during the last two years or more, has been a very frequent visitor here."

"You mean Kinsman?"

At length Mrs. Porchester replied with an affirmative nod.

Having allowed the Squire two minutes in which to familiarize his mind with the thought of having Felix Kinsman for a son-in-law, Mrs. Porchester satisfied him concerning the grounds for her astounding communication. She then spoke in the highest possible terms of Felix Kinsman, bore testimony to the irreproachable discreetness of his demeanour to Ada, and expressed her belief that he was unaware of the affection that the girl had conceived for him. Anyhow it was no fault of his that Ada had fixed her heart upon him. He had certainly never sought her love. If he knew of her affection for him, he had neither responded to it nor in any way encouraged it. Nor was Ada to be blamed, poor child, for bestowing her heart on so gentlemanlike and good a clergyman, with whom circumstances had brought her into peculiarly intimate relations, and whose exquisite kindness to her dying brother had touched her pro-

foundly. It was, of course, inconvenient for their parents when girls of good condition and considerable wealth fell in love with men rather beneath them in degree. But in every respect but wealth Mr. Kinsman was a suitable match for the heiress of Sunningwold. Though he was too honourable a man to aspire to Ada's hand, unless her father specially invited him to do so, Mr. Kinsman would doubtless avail himself with alacrity of Mr. Clissold's permission for him to become Ada's suitor. Anyhow Mrs. Porchester had done her duty in telling the Squire all she knew, and indicating to him what course he ought to take for his girl's restoration to health.

Such was the substance of the information and counsel given to Hardy Clissold by his cousin Maria during the course of a long conversation.

"It is a delicate business," said the Squire, when he had consented to call in Felix Kinsman to Ada's rescue. "It will hardly do for me to go to him and say, 'Kinsman, you are an honourable gentleman; my child is dying

of love for you, come and make her an offer!"

Mrs. Porchester was also of opinion that so abrupt and undiplomatic an overture would not be advisable.

"It's a woman's business," Hardy Clissold remarked, after a minute's meditation, "and you are a monstrously clever woman, Maria. So tell me how it ought to be managed."

Whereto Mrs. Porchester responded,—

"It may be managed in this way. Noel Truelock is very intimate with Mr. Kinsman, and also with us. Mr. Truelock is also a gentleman, on whose tact and honour we can place perfect reliance. If you will let me speak a few words to him, I have no doubt that he will apprise Mr. Kinsman of the state of affairs here, and inform him that you would not decline to receive him as a son-in-law."

"Decline!" ejaculated the Squire. "Why, to save my darling, I would go down on my knees and beg him to marry her. He is a very proper gentleman."

"No doubt. But we must manage this business so as not to compromise ourselves. Mr.

Truelock will give his friend the hint in confidence, and Mr. Kinsman will act on that as readily as he would on an express solicitation made by you."

"Exactly; that is the advantage of my plan," observed the Squire, adopting, after his wont, Mrs. Porchester's scheme, as though it were his own contrivance.

Having gained Hardy Clissold's consent to her plan for enlightening Felix Kinsman, Mrs. Porchester lost no time in securing Noel Truelock's co-operation. A messenger was forthwith dispatched to Bridgeham Rookery with a note, in which Mrs. Porchester begged the artist to come over to Sunningwold and confer with her on a matter of moment and urgency. In reply to which entreaty, Noel Truelock sent word by Mrs. Porchester's messenger that he would visit her in the course of the afternoon.

An hour later Noel was closeted with Mrs. Porchester, who informed him of the alarming state of Ada's health, and of the service which he was required to render for her benefit.

Without demur or any sign of reluctance, he promised to execute the commission promptly, and with the utmost care for the delicacy of the business. Having for two years harboured a suspicion that Noel Truelock was disposed to make Ada an offer, Mrs. Porchester was agreeably surprised to see no sign of disappointment or agitation in his manner, when she asked him to act as a negotiator for an arrangement that would bestow Ada upon another man. He owned that he was not prepared for Mrs. Porchester's revelation, and had never observed anything in Felix Kinsman's conduct to induce him to think that the clergyman was ambitious of becoming Mr. Clissold's son-in-law. But his total freedom from embarrassment and excitement demonstrated to Mrs. Porchester's satisfaction that he would cordially approve of Ada's marriage with Felix Kinsman.

This interview between the artist and Mrs. Porchester having taken place towards the close of a December afternoon, Noel Truelock consented to stop to dinner at the Hall, and

after that repast pay an evening visit to the parsonage.

Ada was too unwell to appear at dinner. Indeed, since her return from Brighton, she had passed the greater part of her days in her bedroom, rising shortly before noon, and resuming her bed at an early hour of the evening. Twice or thrice she had taken her place at the dinner-table; but her mode of life had become so completely that of a chronic invalid, that the Squire would have felt as much surprise as pleasure at seeing her enter the drawing-room shortly before six o'clock on this day of Noel Truelock's presence.

When Mrs. Porchester retired from the dining-room, after tranquilly sipping the large full glass of '47 port, which she consented to drink every day at dessert, for the gratification of her cousin, who liked his port wine to be appreciated, Noel Truelock and the Squire gossiped in a listless fashion about trivial matters of local interest, such as the doings of the Rum-borough hounds and a poaching-case that was making a stir the other side of Needham Regis.

When coffee had made its appearance, and Noel was raising to his lips his cup of the fragrant beverage, Hardy Clissold cautiously intimated that he was cognizant of what had transpired between his companion and Mrs. Porchester before dinner.

"You will not go to the drawing-room, I suppose," said the Squire.

"No," was the answer; "I shall slip away with a cigar in my mouth, and drop in at the parsonage for a chat with Kinsman."

"I know. You are going to do that bit of business for us."

"To see what can be done."

After turning about uneasily in his capacious chair, and breathing with significant loudness for a minute, the Squire said,

"Well, Truelock, you're a man of honour and my cousin, so I can trust you, and I do trust you. What's more, I am obliged to you."

"Kinsman is a man of honour also. Whatever comes of the affair, you may be sure, sir, that you won't regret having authorized me to speak to him."

Turning purple all over his broad face, Hardy Clissold rejoined—

“I know he is a man of honour. If I did not know that, I would e’en let my darling die, without holding up my finger to the man who has not sought her.”

“Kinsman is too proud and honourable a man to seek the love of a girl so placed that his suit might be liable to imputations of sordid motive. Ada is now your only child, and heiress to three thousand a year. Even if he loves her, Kinsman would be slow to make advances to your heiress.”

Noel Truelock rose when he had made this speech, and on passing the Squire’s chair, took the child-like man’s hand in his grasp, and pressed it cordially.

Though he was not one of “the gushing kind,” the artist was so touched by the misery of the simple man’s face, that he could not forbear saying,

“Your trouble is mine, sir. Indeed, for the matter of that, every honest man who knows you makes your griefs his own. For myself,

I love you as though you were my own father."

Whereupon the honest, kindly gentleman rose from his seat, and gently pushing the artist towards the door, said, in a broken voice,

"Be off with you, Noel Truelock!—be off! I can bear hard treatment, but I am not strong enough to hold up against kindness—such kindness as yours."

Nor was he able to bear it; for no sooner had the dining-room door closed on his retreating guest than the Squire dropped into his chair, put his elbows on his dining-table, hid his burly face in his huge hands, and watered his walnut-shells with tears.

CHAPTER XII.

FELIX KINSMAN CONSENTS, AND ADA DECLINES.

THE emissary from Sunningwold Hall, on arriving at the parsonage, found Felix Kinsman at home; and knowing that the clergyman did not object to the smell of a cigar in his study, he entered the room without taking his roll of tobacco from his lips.

Laying aside the book which he was perusing when Noel Truelock's knock announced the approach of a visitor, Felix Kinsman welcomed his friend cordially; and when the guest had taken possession of an easy-chair beside the crackling fire of the cosy little library, he went straight to the business that he had in hand.

"I have been dining at the Hall," he observed, holding his cigar in his left hand, and with his right smoothing his black beard, "and I have come to see you at their request—that is, at Mr. Clissold's and Mrs. Porchester's request."

"Indeed!—do they want me to do anything?"

"Yes—something that you will do either with alacrity, or, after deliberation, from a sense of duty, or will decline to do with great reluctance."

"Indeed!—tell me their wish."

"Ada is very ill."

"Not worse, I hope?"

"Decidedly worse—her condition is critical. There are two sad prospects before the poor girl: she will either grow weaker, and sink into the grave, or she will fall into a yet deeper melancholy, that may result in incurable listlessness and fatuity. This is the opinion which Dr. Scotchmer and Dr. Fisher concur in giving Mrs. Porchester. Of course the doctors have not spoken so plainly to the

Squire, but he knows that his daughter's state is most alarming."

Whilst delivering this mournful account of Ada's condition, Noel Truelock watched his auditor narrowly and steadily, to see how he was affected by the communication; but, save that it assumed a look of lively concern and pity, the clergyman's face exhibited no sign which could be regarded as an indication of his secret emotion. Neither the despair nor the sharp agony of a lover's overpowering interest in the report was visible in his saddened countenance. Any man of feeling would, under the same circumstances, have betrayed the same compassionate interest on hearing of the dangerous illness of a young lady who was nothing more to him than a well-liked friend.

"Is there no third alternative, Truelock?" he asked, in a pathetic tone. "Surely that girl—so bright, and lovely, and happy as she was twelve months since—is not to be taken from us, or endure a fate worse than death?"

"There is a third alternative. She may

recover beauty, health of body and mind, all that made her so unutterably dear to us—if you will be her physician?”

“No, no, Truelock,” the clergyman replied, thinking for the moment that the artist’s words were only a prelude to a demand for his spiritual services. “I can do no more than remind her of her duty, and the divine sympathy with human sufferers. What more can I do?”

“You can marry her,” replied Noel, laying his cigar on the mantel of the fireplace, and gazing steadily into Felix Kinsman’s dark eyes as he delivered the verbal shot.

“Impossible!—you are mad!” exclaimed Felix Kinsman, leaping to his feet; whilst a deadly pallor took possession of his beautiful features.

“Why impossible?” asked Noel Truelock. He added, “But sit down, Kinsman. We must have some talk, for I am here to tell you that if you marry Ada Clissold, she lives; if you don’t marry her, she dies, or goes mad!”

With the air of a man weakened and stunned by a sudden blow, Felix Kinsman resumed his seat.

"You are incapable of trifling with me on such a matter as this, Truelock," he observed hoarsely, when the artist had allowed him a few moments in which to recover his self-possession. "You are incapable of trifling rudely with the name and delicate honour of a girl who is your cousin—your dear cousin. And yet it is incredible. Is it actually true that Mr. Clissold has sent you to me with an offer of his daughter's hand?"

"Quite true."

"Why?—tell me all. Be quick, dear boy! Don't torture me with slow speech!"

"She loves you!"

The words caused Felix Kinsman to writhe, and utter a cry of anguish, and quiver from head to foot, like a culprit at the halberts quivering under the first lash of a military flogging.

In ten seconds the tortured man had regained his self-command, and, clothing him-

self with fortitude, he sat rigidly upright in his chair.

"But I do not love her—cannot love her—can *never* love her, in the way that she desires."

"I am sorry to hear you say so," rejoined Noel Truelock, seriously, and yet with a coolness that was not altogether innocent of flippancy.

"I have never sought her love, or given her reason to suppose that I cared more for her than any other agreeable, well-bred girl in the neighbourhood."

"No one accuses you of having deluded her, or trifled with her. Mr. Clissold and Mrs. Porchester both say that your behaviour to her has been irreproachable, above suspicion, admirable. I say the same."

"Thank you! thank you!" ejaculated Felix Kinsman. "I am glad to hear you say that."

"*She* would say the same. You see, here is the cruel hardship of her case, the agony of her disease. Won by your kindness to poor Jemmy, and all the fine qualities which

are obvious to all your friends, and which she is peculiarly constituted to appreciate, Miss Clissold has given you the affection which you never sought. She knows that you don't care for her, consequently she is dying of neglected love and self-scorn—the bitterest of all slow deaths. To aggravate her self-scorn, there rankles in her tender heart the belief that you know of her love, and despise her for it."

"Despise her for it! Poor thing!—how I pity her! Oh! would that I could love her! But——"

"You can marry her, Kinsman," urged Noel Truelock.

"Impossible!" retorted the other fiercely.

"Have you a wife already?"

"No—I am unmarried."

"Do you love another woman?"

"No other woman."

"Then save her from the grave or madness!" Noel Truelock rejoined, in a voice of urgent entreaty, "by making her your wife. Remember the good old Squire—out of pity

for him, out of compassion for the poor child, whom you regard with the warmest friendship and admiration that fall short of love, marry her."

"Do you, Truelock," asked Felix Kinsman, reproachfully, "really urge me to wed a woman I do not love?"

"I do," the artist answered warmly, almost angrily. "You are not the generous man that I believe you to be if you will not decide to save her life, her father's life, at a slight sacrifice of your own wishes. Since you are free to marry her, you ought to marry her."

"No! no! no!—you speak in ignorance, Truelock!"

"After all, it is no such great sacrifice that you are asked to make. You are invited to take for your wife a girl who is well-born, well-bred, highly accomplished, of the sweetest possible disposition, exquisitely beautiful, and heiress of an old county estate. What do you object to the proposal? That you don't quite love the girl whom you admire?

In the hope that you may one day encounter and win a woman completely to your taste, you will reject Ada Clissold, and let her die or go mad, knowing that either of those calamities will bring dear old Clissold to the grave. Upon my honour, Kinsman, you men of the cloth can sometimes be monstrously selfish, with the approval of your own consciences."

Noel Truelock's rhetoric had an obvious effect on his friend.

The clergyman was silenced, subdued, if not convinced by Ada's advocate. Resting his right elbow on one arm of his easy-chair, and concealing his face with his right hand from Noel Truelock, he sat for five minutes in speechless meditation. Leaving him to his thoughts, Noel Truelock took the remainder of his half-smoked cigar from the mantel, lit it, and recommenced smoking, whilst he surveyed the outlines of the clergyman's slight frame, the snowy whiteness of his upraised hand, and the waving curls of his dark brown hair.

When Felix Kinsman dropped his right hand, and raising his head, looked his companion again in the face, Noel Truelock was struck by the tender sadness and resolute air of the countenance exhibited to his gaze. It seemed also to the artist that emotion had imparted, in the course of a few minutes, a worn and almost aged look to a face ordinarily remarkable for youthfulness of aspect.

"I will see Miss Clissold. I have no doubt that I can disabuse her mind of its very painful and quite erroneous impression that I was aware of her affection and disdained it. If my talk with her effects no other good, it will mitigate her self-scorn, by convincing her that instead of being an object of my disesteem, she has always possessed my respectful sympathy and admiration. By relieving her mind of that galling and humiliating misconception, I shall at least do something to help her to composure."

"You will make her an offer?"

"If, after our interview, she wishes me to

stand to her in the relation of a husband, she shall be my wife."

"I may communicate your resolution to Mr. Clissold to-night?"

"By all means. Tell him that I feel highly honoured by the compliment he has paid me in intimating his willingness to have me for a son-in-law; and say that, unless I am requested by him to refrain from acting on my intention, I shall call at the Hall at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon, in the hope of being allowed to see Miss Clissold. Probably before I go to bed I shall send Mr. Clissold a brief note, saying what I now ask you to say to him for me before you return to Bridg-ham."

"Thank heaven that you have decided so, Kinsman! Your determination, I am confident, will result in happiness to yourself. Anyhow, it will save Ada Clissold. She will be restored to health, and make an excellent wife for you."

Quickly and decisively Felix Kinsman answered,

"She will never be my wife. She will refuse me."

The tone in which they were uttered, scarcely less than the words themselves, would have perplexed Noel Truelock, had he not for many months entertained far clearer and more definite notions respecting his friend's private story than the clergyman imagined,—had he not, in fact, ascertained the chief fact of the mystery which it was the main purpose of Felix Kinsman's life to preserve from detection.

As he retraced his steps from the Parsonage to the Hall, after bidding his friend good evening, Noel Truelock thought to himself—

"The interview between Kinsman and Ada will result in good, though their marriage is an impossibility. He will satisfy her that she has not been the object of his contempt: to be freed from that notion will be a great gain to her. Perhaps he will be perfectly candid with her, throw away his disguise, and prove to her that she has been the mere victim of illusion and misconceptions, arising out of his

strange and reprehensible conduct. The shock of such an astounding revelation will startle her out of her stupefying sorrow, and open a new chapter of life to her. She may recover her strength and spirits, and quickly reach a state of mind which will dispose her to listen favourably to Ben Bloxham's prayers."

And whilst Noel Truelock was thus communing with himself, Felix Kinsman, in the solitude of his locked study, was surrendering himself to the emotions of agonizing grief, that, in the violence of its physical demonstrations, differed greatly from manly sorrow.

"This punishment is awful, sharper, heavier than any calamity fate ever put upon me. And it is the result of my own sin, my own impious hypocrisy. I have fallen into the very pit which I have striven to avoid. I have exchanged the scorn of others for self-scorn. To escape human hatred and insult, I have sinned against nature and nature's God. Avenging herself, nature has cursed me with a love that will never perish, and can never be gratified.

And my conscience tells me that my sin is unpardonable in the sight of God. His everlasting displeasure is my doom. If that poor darling dies, the crime of murder rests upon my soul. Murders are not perpetrated only with the knife, the pistol, the poisons of chemical art. They may be wrought by poisonous words--by lies spoken and lies acted."

Having given vent to his remorse, and terror, and self-aborrence in disjointed speeches, delivered with the emphasis of despair, the young man, exhausted by the violence of his agitation, fell upon his sofa, and covering his features with his hands, as though he could thereby hide himself from his spiritual accusers, sobbed convulsively; not like a man broken and crushed by grief, but like a woman untrained in the art of self-control.

After awhile the paroxysm of anguish subsided, and rising from the couch on which he had fallen prostrate before the assailants of his fortitude, he wrote a short letter for

Mr. Clissold's perusal on the following morning.

The letter finished, and directed for delivery, Felix Kinsman went out into his garden, and spent several hours of a bleak, wintry night pacing up and down its principal walk. It was not till prolonged exercise had thoroughly fatigued him that he re-entered the Parsonage, and ascended to his bedroom.

In the afternoon of the next day he kept the appointment which he had made at the Hall.

He was received by Mrs. Porchester, who had arranged that Hardy Clissold should be absent from his house at the hour fixed for the interview between Ada and the clergyman.

Few women were better qualified than Mrs. Porchester to receive such a visitor as Felix Kinsman.

Instead of thanking him for the tenor of his reply to the proposal which Noel Truelock had conveyed to him, Mrs. Porchester acted as though the overtures had come from him,

and been accepted by her and her cousin Hardy. Had he appeared in the lady's drawing-room at his own solicitation, and to receive an answer to his own supplication for Ada's hand, she would have received him precisely in the same manner.

Avoiding all needless explanations, Mrs. Porchester went at once to the object which Felix was presumed to have in view. She was delighted to tell him that Ada was better—was sitting up in her little reading-room, and really looking almost herself again. She had some chat with the dear girl, who was greatly excited—most *pleasantly* excited—by the prospect of an interview with him. Of course the dear girl knew the object of Mr. Kinsman's visit. His wishes had been made known to her, and, of course—(Mrs. Porchester hesitated, and threw a faint suspicion of a blush into her sleek, smiling face)—there had been a few happy tears. They had, however, been dried up hours since, and the dear child was waiting, in a tumult of delightful emotions, and listening for the sound

of his footsteps. Mr. Kinsman knew the door of the darling's sitting-room, and might go thither unattended. If he tapped at her door, the dear child would answer, and then he could announce himself. Mrs. Porchester would not disturb them, for she knew that lovers liked to be left alone. Perhaps, when he came downstairs, Mr. Kinsman would visit the drawing-room again for a minute, and say how the interview in the little reading-room had gone off.

Availing himself with more alacrity than delight of the permission thus accorded to him, Felix Kinsman escaped from Mrs. Porchester, and, having mounted the first two flights of the grand oaken staircase, tapped at the well-known door. A voice in the room called out faintly "Come in!", and in another ten seconds the Reverend Felix Kinsman was in the presence of Mrs. Porchester's "dear child," who, flushed though she was with excitement, looked alarmingly delicate and distressingly feeble. Her eyes were red with weeping, and there were traces of tears on

her cheeks—by no means so radiant with happiness as Mrs. Porchester had represented them. She trembled violently when Felix Kinsman approached the easy-chair which she occupied.

* * * * *

The interview was one of those scenes which art forbids the novelist to describe. Moreover, it was attended with revelations which it would be premature to communicate to the reader, even at this late point of a narrative that is fast nearing its end. What those revelations were, the peruser of this story must be content to guess, until he has passed his eye over a few more pages.

For the present, it is enough to say that the disclosures of that interview startled Ada far more than they pained her. They occasioned her surprise, wonder, bewilderment, but produced for her no new source of mental torture. If they shocked, and even terrified her for a few minutes, they also dispelled illusions chiefly accountable for her recent dejection and unrest. They drew from her heart the poison-

ous thorn of self-scorn, and, without severing Felix Kinsman from her sympathy and affectionate regard, wrought a sudden revolution in her feeling for him.

The interview over, Felix Kinsman descended the grand staircase, and, faithful to his promise, looked in for a few brief moments on Mrs. Porchester, who was impatient for intelligence.

"Well?" said the lady.

"I think Miss Clissold will derive comfort from her talk with me. At present she is very agitated, but unless the excitement of our interview should produce corresponding depression, I think that no ill will result from what has transpired between us."

"Of course," observed Mrs. Porchester, "she gave a satisfactory answer to your entreaty?"

"Her answer, my dear Mrs. Porchester, was most satisfactory—in every respect most satisfactory."

"I heartily congratulate both you and her."

"Thank you, thank you," rejoined Felix Kinsman, taking her proffered hand, and

pressing it cordially as he added, "but, as I must keep an especially important engagement, pardon me for not entering on particulars just now."

Before Mrs. Porchester could find words with which to delay his retreat, Felix Kinsman dropped her hand, made a deferential bow, and hastened from the presence of the lady, who was not a little astonished by his quick departure.

Felix Kinsman having failed to satisfy her curiosity, Mrs. Porchester, in her concern for her cousin's child, went unexpectedly to the little room—if I were a fashionable novelist, I should call it a "boudoir,"—where she found Ada, still sitting in her lounge-chair, and fully prepared for her chaperon's expected appearance.

"My darling!" ejaculated Mrs. Porchester effusively, kissing the girl's forehead, and laying a hand gently on her sunny tresses.

"Have you seen Mr. Kinsman?" Ada inquired, with astounding coolness, and almost her ordinary voice.

"For two seconds. He came into the drawing-room to shake hands with me, and then ran away. Of course I did not try to detain him."

"That was right of you; for, of course, I can tell you all that you ought to know," responded Miss Ada, turning her tearless eyes upwards to Mrs. Porchester, and regarding her steadily.

"You do not seem to have broken his heart. He did not look, my darling, as if he had any reason to complain of your unkindness."

"I am glad of that. And I have not been unkind to him."

"*My pet!*" ejaculated Mrs. Porchester. After a few seconds' pause, she added, in a confidential, whispering tone, "It is all settled, then?"

Ada sighed, folded her hands lazily, and then answered coldly, as though her interview with the clergyman had related to a matter of no importance,

"Yes, it is all settled."

"To your satisfaction?"

"Quite. And I shall be better now that it is settled."

"You have accepted him?" inquired Mrs. Porchester, in a tone of curiosity and bewilderment.

"No—I have refused him."

Mrs. Porchester gave a little start, that was followed by a slight cry of astonishment.

Availing herself of the opportunity which Mrs. Porchester's movement of surprise afforded her of escaping from her chaperon's endearments and caresses, Ada rose from her chair with an unusual display of vigour, and walked three paces away from her companion.

"Refused him!—I cannot believe my ears!" Mrs. Porchester exclaimed.

"You may trust them—they do not deceive you. I have refused Mr. Kinsman."

"In the name of all that's wonderful, why have you refused him?"

A look of firmness, qualified by defiance, ap-

peared in the girl's worn, pallid, gentle little face as she responded,

"At present I am not at liberty to tell you. A few weeks hence I shall perhaps be free to reveal to you the reasons which have determined me not to be Mr. Kinsman's wife."

"Your conduct is unaccountable."

"It must appear so; and, in that respect, it resembles heaven and earth. But," she implored, languidly, as though the effort of opposing Mrs. Porchester's will had exhausted her, "don't talk with me any longer. I am weary, and wish to be alone. I shall go to my bed-room, and lie down for an hour."

* * * * *

Whilst Mrs. Porchester was being repulsed in this extraordinary and irresistible fashion by her unaccountable Ada, Felix Kinsman was on his way to Bridgeham Rookery, where he arrived after the close of the bleak December day.

To his inquiry for Noel Truelock, he was answered by the servant, who opened the front door of the artist's house,

"Mr. Truelock is not at home, sir."

"Out with the hounds?" Felix Kinsman asked. "Not returned from hunting?"

"Mr. Truelock drove over to Needham Regis this morning, sir, and caught the express train for London," was the servant's answer.

"Indeed! Your master was with me last night, and did not tell me that he was about to run up to town."

The servant—a man who officiated as Noel's studio-factotum, and, like handy servitors of his class, never neglected an opportunity for gossip—informed the disappointed caller that his master's journey to London was not decided on till a late hour of the previous night. Mr. Truelock would probably spend five or six days in town. Would not Mr. Kinsman walk in, rest himself, have a glass of claret, see the children?

No, Mr. Kinsman was too busy to stop at the Bookery, since he could not see its master.

Thanking Joe Henschman for his hospitable suggestions, whilst declining them, Felix Kinsman turned abruptly on his heel, and walked off rapidly towards Sunningwold.

CHAPTER XIII.

NOEL TRUELOCK CALLS ON HIS LAWYER, AND
MAKES AN APPOINTMENT WITH A POLICE MAGIS-
TRATE.

LIVING habitually in the country, Noel Truelock was not without a London address. In the metropolitan directories he was registered as "Noel Truelock, A.R.A., Bridgeham Rookery, —shire: Athenæum Club, Pall Mall: 4, Connaught Place, Hall Road, St. John's Wood, W. C." On show-Sundays, artists, running the round of the studios to see the pictures about to be sent to the Royal Academy, knew that by calling at 4, Connaught Place, St. John's Wood, they would see whatever

works Noel intended to display at the next exhibition of the Academy. To that address picture-dealers, in the years of Noel's most prolific industry, were wont to send their written communications for the well-known painter. No. 4, Connaught Place, a detached villa, with a large studio built out in its backward garden, has for many a day been the residence of Leonard Donkin, of "The Old Water Colour Society;" and one of the bedrooms in Leonard Donkin's modest house had for years been appropriated to the use of his particular friend, when, on a certain foggy afternoon in December, 1868, Leonard Donkin received a telegraphic message, announcing Noel's arrival at the Athenæum Club, and requesting that his bed-room might be prepared for his use during the ensuing night.

The next morning, when he had breakfasted with Mr. and Mrs. Donkin, and seen Leonard start for the Victoria Station by an early omnibus, Noel Truelock whiled away a couple of hours in his friend's suburban studio, turning over Leonard's numerous folios of water-colour

sketches, perusing certain old copies of Quebec newspapers, and meditating about a subject that for many months had engaged much of his attention. The folio, which he scrutinized more curiously than any of the other collections of Leonard Donkin's unsold drawings, was known to the water-colour artist's intimate friends as the Canadian Folio, and contained those artistic memorials of Leonard's Canadian trip, which he either retained from his patron's hands for his own particular pleasure, or had hitherto failed to sell at his high, if not exorbitant, prices. Together with these performances of Leonard's brush, the folio contained the half a dozen specimens of vigorous drawing and masterly colouring which caused a commotion some years since in Leonard's "set," when, on his return from Canada, he exhibited them to his special chums as illustrations of the extraordinary artistic power of Miss Felicia Avalon, of Quebec.

After examining, for the hundredth time, Miss Avalon's brilliant and daring performances, Noel Truelock restored the folio to its proper

resting-place, and, having seated himself before the studio's blazing fire, observed mentally,

"Those glowing, gorgeous pieces of Canadian scenery were done by the same hand that produced the 'Sunset in Sunningwold Park.' No two dreams are like. No two artists were ever made so precisely of the same stuff, and inspired with the same artistic feeling, that it is possible for those Canadian pieces and Kinsman's 'Sunset in Sunningwold Park' to have been produced by different workers. I dare swear it in any court of justice!"

Having settled his mind conclusively on this point, Noel Truelock took from the breast-pocket of his walking-coat a packet of Canadian journals, and pieces of Canadian newspapers, containing reports of, and statements concerning, Felicia Avalon's trial on charges of writing and uttering libels respecting divers inhabitants of Quebec. Noel did not now peruse those printed papers for the first time. During the last twelve months he had studied them so often and closely, that they contained no single particular, relating to that extraordinary

criminal investigation, which frequent reading and reflection had not bitten deeply into his memory. Amongst the printed papers there were also several accounts of the wreck of the "Mary Queen," on her voyage from Canada towards England. These narratives of a disaster that the general public had by this time almost forgotten, Noel Truelock also reperused, though he could have repeated by heart nearly every sentence of their contents.

When he had once again studied these printed documents, Noel Truelock folded them up in a neat packet, and put them for safe custody in the fire-proof chest that stood in a corner of a studio. This fire-proof iron chest was Noel's property, and was the receptacle of his most valuable papers, although it stood in a house where he was no more than a dearly-loved guest.

After turning the key of this ponderous chest, and confiding the key to one of his pockets, Noel Truelock left the studio. Having put on his overcoat, he entered Mrs. Don-

kins' drawing-room, where he found that lady, and informed her that he was going into town on particular business, and certainly should not return to dinner; perhaps he should not return to pass the next night under her roof. If he returned, it would be at a late hour, when he could "let himself in" by means of his latch-key.

Five minutes later the artist hailed a cab in Wellington Road, and having given the driver a brief direction, entered the vehicle.

Precisely at 2.15 P.M., Noel Truelock might have been seen alighting from this carriage at the door of a house in Wimpole Street, situated near the southward end of that most respectable but somewhat lugubrious thoroughfare.

The house was the residence of Mr. Angus Talk, solicitor, an elderly gentleman, who had his offices on the ground-floor of his residence. A legal practitioner, of many clients and honourable repute, Mr. Talk was chiefly remarkable for a taciturnity that contrasted strongly and humorously with the loquacious

promise of his name. He prided himself on never, in the whole course of his professional career, having said a word too much. At moments of acute anxiety his employers were wont to accuse him of saying too little; but they trusted the silent man, who always did rather more than he undertook to accomplish in the interests of his professional connections, and whose taciturnity made them confident that he was incapable of gossiping about their confidential communications. To do him justice, it must be allowed that he was an admirable listener. No degree of prolixity in a nervous client ever goaded him to impatience; and when he had heard a voluble talker's last word, the man of legal mind and cautious tongue was wont to say, "I remember all you have said, and will take the proper steps." Mr. Talk never took a wrong step. He never went too fast, or too slow, or without consideration.

The chief of the four clerks, who plied their pens silently in the larger office of this silent lawyer, ushered Noel Truelock into

the presence of Mr. Talk, who had made an appointment with the visitor, and had ordered that on his arrival Mr. Truelock should be introduced to him immediately.

"Have you succeeded in your inquiries, sir?" the client inquired of the small, shrivelled neatly-clad attorney, who, after rising to receive and shake hands with the artist, resumed his arm-chair before his office-table, without having uttered a word.

"Yes," was the answer. After a pause Mr. Talk, making an effort in the direction of conversational diffuseness, added — "I have."

"What! you have proved the identity of Mr. Felix Kinsman, of Sunningwold, with the Rev. Felix Avalon, of Quebec?"

"I have."

"Good! When did he change his name?"

"See," returned the speaker of monosyllables, handing his client a duly-certified official copy of the letters patent authorizing the Reverend Felix Avalon, of Gerard Street,

Russell Square, to assume the surname of Kinsman.

"Then," observed Noel Truelock, when he had remarked the date of the official permission, "he took the curacy of St. Jude's, Clerkenwell, after he had assumed his present surname?"

"He did."

"That accounts for the name of Felix Avalon nowhere appearing in the lists of the English clergy, published in London. It also accounts for the difficulty I experienced before I consulted you on the matter."

"It does."

Having folded the document given to him by Mr. Talk, and placed it in his pocket-book, Noel Truelock remarked to the solicitor,

"I thank you, sir, for the expedition with which you have done me this service; and, as I know that every moment of your time is valuable, I will bid you good afternoon."

"Thank you."

Smiling as he touched the little man's reluctantly extended hand, Noel added—

"I trust that I have not already taken up too much of your time."

In his droll, repellent way, Mr. Talk was a humourist, and responding to the artist's smile with a gracious and comical look, he replied—

"No, sir. You say enough, and not too much. If all people kept their tongues in order as you do, 'pen my honour, I should like to go, now and then, a little into society."

The hansom cab had waited at the attorney's door during Noel Truelock's brief interview with Mr. Talk; and on re-entering the vehicle, the artist ordered his driver to proceed to the police-court in Great Marlborough Street.

At that somewhat confined, and dingy, and odoriferous temple of Justice, Noel Truelock saw the chief-clerk, Mr. Busterby, elder brother of Jem Busterby, master of the well-known "School of Art," at the corner of Castle Street and Portland Road. His fraternal connection with artistic circles disposed Mr. Busterby to exhibit friendliness to the artists and art-stu-

dents whose business or indiscretions brought them under the roof of his official residence; and on learning that Noel wanted to see Mr. Manchester, the stipendiary magistrate, then sitting in a court of divers smells, and administering summary justice on an Irish bricklayer who had flogged his wife with a poker for keeping sober while he was drunk, Mr. Busterby undertook that the artist should have his desire without any unreasonable delay.

After a lapse of five minutes, Noel Truelock was received in a private, office-like parlour by the courteous gentleman who is famous at the Portland Club as "George Manchester, the best whist-player in London," and known throughout England as "Mr. Manchester of the Marlborough Street Police Court."

Mr. Manchester, having for years had a slight acquaintance with Noel Truelock, received his visitor with the cordiality and frankness of friendship.

"I received your letter last night, Mr. Truelock," the magistrate remarked, "and I have

given it careful consideration. All the facts of that singular trial at Quebec I remember distinctly; for the case occasioned much talk at the time, and I was especially interested in the charges against Miss Avalon, because her father and my father were officers in the same regiment, and rivals for the hand of the lady who subsequently became my mother. You need not, therefore, trouble yourself to recall the circumstances of the criminal investigation. Let me see, Miss Avalon's sentence was a fine and a year's imprisonment."

"A heavy fine and a cruel imprisonment," returned Noel Truelock, in a voice that betrayed the pain with which he reflected on the fate of Major Tilbury's victim, "but they were the lighter parts of her severe punishment."

"No doubt, no doubt," rejoined Mr. Manchester, "the degradation of such a sentence and exposure was awful. I remember that, believing in the lady's guilt and the justice of the sentence, I almost experienced a source of relief when I heard of her death in the wreck of 'The Mary Queen!'"

"It is horrible to think that human justice may be so misled into barbarous mistakes."

"And who is the man whose deposition you wish me to take?"

"Major Tilbury."

"Tilbury?—Tilbury? There was a man of that name in the Artillery years since: an officer who was for a while a fast man about town,—Joseph Curtain Tilbury."

"That is the man," Noel Truelock replied. "He is several years my senior; but we were school-fellows, and knew each other again, when I was an art-student, and he a lieutenant in the Royal Artillery."

"Yes."

"Some months since—last season—as I was walking down Regent Street, and passing the doorway of the Lansdowne Chambers, I saw a middle-aged man, evidently broken by sickness, in the process of being lifted from an open-carriage by his valet and the porter of the Chambers. In the bloated and pallid face of the invalid I scarcely recognized the countenance of one who, in early manhood, used to

be thought the handsomest young officer of the Queen's Artillery. He recognized me, and whilst he stood on the pavement between his carriage, in which he had been taking an airing in the Park, and the building where he had chambers, he addressed me feebly by name. 'You don't forget me?' he said in a hoarse whisper, as he leaned on the arm of his servant. 'My dear boy,' I answered, 'you have been ill?' 'Ill! I am dying!' was his response. Remembering the man's old humour, and wishing to cheer him with such jocoseness as he formerly delighted in, I replied, 'No, Tilbury, you won't die so easily: don't flatter yourself; you will suffer awfully before you go!' A moment later I repented my untimely and indecent flippancy. Putting a trembling hand in mine, and regarding me with a look of unutterable anguish, he responded with terrible significance, 'I don't care what I suffer *in this world*; but it will soon be over with me here,—*and then?*' "

The dramatic effect, with which Noel True-lock reproduced the sick man's look of horror

and voice of despair, whilst repeating his words, made the best whist-player in London shudder.

“Go on, my dear sir,—be brief.”

“I have seen a good deal of Tilbury since I encountered him thus accidentally,” resumed Noel Truelock, obeying the magistrate’s injunction. “I live in the country, but I have contrived to run up to town, and see him once in every ten days or fortnight. The man has been residing in Lansdowne Chambers for twelve months, deserted by his old friends, slowly dying of a complication of diseases, suffering bodily torture, and looking forward with a coward’s and a sinner’s horror to his dissolution. Ten days since he revealed to me the chief cause of his mental misery,—remorse for having, in revenge for an affront put upon him by Miss Avalon, brought her to a felon’s shame. He has implored me to find Miss Avalon’s brother, who escaped from the wreck of ‘The Mary Queen,’ was indeed the solitary survivor of the wreck,—in order that he may confess to him his enormous

wickedness, and implore his pardon for having caused his sister's ignominy and death. Like most men of his sort, careless, godless, impious in health, and weakly superstitious under the progress of bodily decay and the fear of death, Major Tilbury never in his heart disbelieved the religion which he used to ridicule with his tongue. He now believes that Felix Avalon's priestly absolution can win heaven's pardon for him, and save him from damnation. I am doing my best to discover Mr. Avalon. If I find that clergyman, I shall endeavour to bring him to Major Tilbury's death-bed. In the meantime, the dying man, moved by my representations as well as his own conscience, wishes to make a sworn confession of his guilt, that, should he die without seeing Mr. Avalon, may be used to clear Miss Avalon's memory of the infamy which rests upon it."

"And you want me to take the culprit's deposition?" inquired the famous whist-player, concealing the profound emotion which his

visitor's communication occasioned him, under a masque of business-like formality and coolness.

"That is what I want."

"To be sure. This matter, of course, affects and excites you, Mr. Truelock. But to me it is a mere matter of business. The duties of a criminal magistrate's office are hardening, my dear sir—pleasantly, mercifully hardening. There rarely passes a month in which I have not to take the sworn deposition of a dying person. Let me see," continued the magistrate, taking out his watch, "how the time goes. Half-past three; and I must return to my court to transact another hour's work. Umph! shall we make an appointment for to-morrow? Or is danger so imminent that you think I had better attend at Lansdowne Chambers this afternoon?"

"Dr. Hargreaves," replied Noel Truelock, "is of opinion that Major Tilbury's state is most precarious. He is suffering from Bright's

disease, and another not less deadly malady. Moreover, his heart is in such a condition that, if he were to die suddenly whilst we are talking about him, his death would not occasion his physician any astonishment."

Having received this account of the dying man's peril, the author of 'Manchester's Maxims for the Card-Table' took from his breast-pocket a small note-book, containing the lists of his engagements; and after ascertaining from the diary his arrangements for the rest of the day, he observed, "I have a dinner-party in Eaton Place at eight, and an appointment at the Portland at eleven thirty. Shall we say six o'clock? I can come down with my chief clerk, Mr. Busterby, to Lansdowne Chambers at that hour; and, if I make the confessor speak briefly and to the point, I shall be able to get away in time to dress for my friend's dinner-party."

"Thank you, my dear sir," responded Noel Truelock, taking up his hat and preparing

to depart; "I will cause arrangements to be made at Lansdowne Chambers, so that you shall not be detained one unnecessary minute in the dying man's chamber."

When the artist had left the parlour, Mr. Manchester soliloquized—

"Gentlemanlike fellow that painter, and very good-looking! He is a great artist, but too nervous and emotional to be a good whist-player. To be a really excellent whist-player a man must be cool, hard, unfeeling. Thank Heaven, I am as hard as steel! If I were not cold as ice and hard as steel, I should be moved by the thought of the fate of that poor girl, ruined in fame and killed by such a monstrous scoundrel! Heigho! and she was the daughter of the man who went to Canada because my mother refused him! But I am not stirred,—not a bit!"

But before this cool and consummate practitioner of whist returned to his court, to deal out justice to vulgar criminals, he took out his pocket-handkerchief, and made a

parade to himself of blowing his nose, whilst
he wiped away the brightening wetness of
his eyes.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOSEPH CURTAIN TILBURY'S CONFESSION.

WHEN Mr. Manchester entered a suite of lofty and luxuriously furnished rooms in Lansdowne Chambers, to receive the deposition of Major Tilbury, he was met by Noel Truelock, who conducted him forthwith to the apartment, where the sick man was lying on his bed, propped up by pillows. Prepared by his valet for the interview with the magistrate, Joseph Tilbury appeared stronger, and in every respect less like a person in extreme illness than Mr. Manchester expected to find him. The pallor of his bloated face indicated the urgency of his maladies; but his visage lacked the tenuity usually observable in patients

debilitated by months of acute suffering, and its features still retained some traces of the comeliness for which they were once remarkable. His grizzled hair had been combed, his beard and moustaches had been dressed; and a richly embroidered dressing-gown, of gaudy pattern and warm material, enveloped the upper part of his figure.

A table, furnished with writing materials, and a large shaded lamp, stood at the lower end of one side of the patient's bed; and two chairs had been placed at this table, for the use of the stipendiary magistrate and Mr. Busterby.

Having taken possession of one of these chairs, whilst Mr. Busterby seated himself in the other, Mr. Manchester, after silently regarding the occupant of the bed for a few moments, observed with official formality,

"At your request, conveyed to me by your friend, Mr. Truelock, I am here, Major Tilbury, to receive a statement which you are desirous to make to me."

In a husky and weak voice, that far more

than his face betrayed his extreme debility, Major Tilbury replied,

"I wish to make a statement on oath. I must be sworn."

"Of course you shall be sworn. And this gentleman, Mr. Busterby, after administering to you the oath usually taken by witnesses in Courts of Justice, will write down word for word whatever communications you may be pleased to make. When you shall have completed your statement, the record of it will be read to you, so that you may add to it, or otherwise amend it. You will then be required to sign it, if you have strength to do so. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, I understand."

"Allow me, also, to do my duty," continued the magistrate, "by reminding you that the statements which you thus make may be used as evidence against you in any criminal proceedings that may ensue from your communications, should you, contrary to your expectation, be restored to a condition of health in which it would be advisable to prosecute you

for the perpetration of the offences which you allege yourself to have committed. You must bear that in mind, whilst you are speaking."

"I will bear it in mind, sir," returned Major Tilbury. "There is no danger of my admissions being used against me in a Court of Justice."

"You have, of course, well thought over the substance of the communication which you are about to make. But I may advise you to be clear and precise in your language. If you wish for a few minutes in which to arrange your thoughts, I will wait with pleasure."

"I am ready to speak now, sir. Let me be sworn. The time may be precious," responded the sick man, with an indication of querulousness and irritability.

Glancing at Mr. Busterby, the magistrate said, "Swear him."

The only person present in the room during this conversation, and whilst the sick man made his confession, besides the magistrate, his clerk, and the confessor, was Noel Truelock,

who remained, at Major Tilbury's request, in the chamber throughout the proceedings. The invalid's man-servant had been despatched on a mission to the city, in order that he should be absent from his master's chambers whilst the deposition was being made.

Having repeated the words of the oath after Mr. Busterby, and kissed a copy of the New Testament, Joseph Tilbury, using carefully considered and pre-arranged language, spoke thus :—

“I am extremely ill, and know that I have not many days to live. To gain God's pardon for my sins, and to do justice to a woman whom I injured barbarously, I wish to make a confession of crimes committed by me. In the year 1861, Miss Felicia Avalon, of The Fairmead, Quebec, was convicted on trial by jury of writing and publishing defamatory libels against certain persons in Canada. The trial took place in the Court House of Quebec, and, having been found guilty, Miss Felicia Avalon was sentenced to pay a fine, and be imprisoned for twelve months. She was im-

prisoned for a year, and subsequently perished in the wreck of the 'Mary Queen' steamer. My confession is this:—I myself, without the help of any accomplice, wrote and published all the libels which Miss Avalon was punished for writing. Miss Avalon had rejected an offer of marriage that I made her. She had put another and still more grievous affront upon me—she had also held me up to odium in her novel called 'The Mother Country.' In resentment at her treatment of me, and in a spirit of hellish revenge, for which may God pardon me, I determined to blast her character and crush her. To do this, I wrote more than three hundred libels in a feigned handwriting, made to look like her handwriting when disguised; and these libels I myself posted at different Canadian post-offices. I was always clever at imitating handwritings, and I was familiar with Miss Avalon's handwriting. The witnesses who swore that they saw Miss Avalon post some of the libels at the Grand Post Office of Quebec, were honest, but deluded witnesses. They

did not see Miss Avalon post them; they saw me, disguised in a dress which I assumed to make them mistake me for Miss Avalon. Captain Darby, Mr. Clarkson, and the constable, Benjamin Grady, were all my dupes. When Benjamin Grady believed himself to be speaking to Miss Avalon in St. Ursule Street, he was speaking to me. It was I whom he saw enter the outer court of Miss Messurier's house. When I heard him walk away, I slipped out of the court, between the street-wall and Miss Messurier's front door, and went to the wooden summer-house in the Castle Gardens, where I slipped my disguise into a bag, and walked back to barracks, carrying the bag and the disguise with me. The criminatory papers, found in the secret receptacle of Miss Avalon's desk at The Fairmead, I put in that receptacle on the day of Miss Messurier's funeral in the Roman Catholic Cathedral. I knew that all The Fairmead household would be at the funeral, and when the house was empty, I entered it, and went straight to Miss Avalon's study,

adjoining her bedroom. Fortunately for my purpose I found the key of her desk; so I opened the desk, and put the papers in the secret place where they were found. The success of my plan of revenge was aided by my getting sight of some of the paper bought at Montreal, on which Miss Avalon wrote her first novel, and used to write notes. But I need not enter into particulars. I have said enough. I had no accomplice; but I gained much of the information contained in my libels from Josephine Hardiment, a woman of notoriously bad character in Quebec. She has since died—I mean Josephine Hardiment. But she did not know that I wanted or used her information for evil. A curse has rested on me since Miss Avalon perished in the wreck of the steamer on her way to England. I regard myself as her murderer. I hope this confession may be regarded by the Almighty as an atonement, and help to remove the curse from my soul. I am weak and tired, and can

say no more. I hope I have said enough. May God pardon me!"

Mr. Busterby was not a short-hand writer, but he was a very quick penman. It was his boast that his pen, without the aid of caligraphic abbreviations, could keep pace with the utterances of fairly deliberate speakers; and as the short sentences of the foregoing declaration were spoken very slowly, and divided by brief pauses, in which the speaker took breath, the clerk experienced no difficulty in writing down the words as they came from Joseph Curtain Tilbury's lips.

Towards the close of his statement, Major Tilbury's voice grew fainter; and when he had uttered the final "May God pardon me!" he exhibited signs of exhaustion, that induced Noel Truelock to come to his side, and put a tumbler of cold brandy and water to his lips. Of this beverage the wretched man took a liberal draught; and whilst the stimulant was restoring him, the record of his statement was perused by Mr. Manchester.

The words of the deposition were read

aloud by Mr. Busterby to the deponent, who declared the correctness of the record, and his ability to sign it. Whereupon a pen was put into the sick man's hand, and he placed his signature, "Joseph Curtain Tilbury," at the foot of the writing.

Mr. Manchester then took the document, and appended to it these words :—

"The foregoing statement was made by Major Tilbury, formerly of the Royal Artillery, being duly sworn at his chambers, in Lansdowne Chambers, Regent Street, on December 1st, 1868, in my presence, and in the presence of Mr. Richard Busterby, Chief Clerk of the Great Marlborough Street Police Court, and Noel Truelock, Esq., A.R.A.

(Signed) "GEORGE MANCHESTER,
"Barrister-at-law, and Stipendiary Magistrate
attached to the Great Marlborough Street
Police Court."

The following note of attestation was also added :—

"We, the undersigned, were present when

Major Tilbury made the foregoing statement to Mr. Manchester, and we saw the said Major Tilbury sign it, after having heard it read, and after declaring it to be a true and exact record of his confession.

“RICHARD BUSTERBY,

“Attorney-at-law.

“NOEL TRUELOCK,

“Associate of the Royal Academy.”

The document, thus signed and attested, was confided to Mr. Busterby by the stipendiary magistrate, who, after completing the business which he had come to Lansdowne Chambers to transact, shook hands with Noel Truelock, and went off immediately to dress for the dinner-party in Eaton Place.

When Noel Truelock found himself again in the company of Major Tilbury, without the presence of a third person, he approached the dying man, and inquired whether his recent exertions had weakened him painfully.

“No, Truelock,” was the answer, uttered calmly. “I am better now. I am glad I have done it. My mind is easier, and I thank

you greatly for the trouble that you have taken for me."

"Are you well enough to receive an important piece of intelligence?" the artist inquired.

"Yes—what is it?"

"A piece of good news."

A pathetic look of surprise and hope came to the face of the invalid, who dreaded death, as he asked quickly—

"What! does Hargreaves say there is hope?"

Noel Truelock shook his head mournfully.

"What! not for a month—only another month?" was the rejoinder to the artist's gesture.

"I have not seen Hargreaves to-day," Noel replied.

The sick man, suddenly guessing the purport of the communication which his companion wished to break to him, started in his bed, and stretching forth his right hand, exclaimed, "You have found Felix Avalon?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?—here?"

"No, not here," responded Noel Truelock ;
"but I have discovered his abode. He lives
in the country, and I am going to make a
journey of some distance to-night by a fast
train to see him, and I hope to be able to
bring him here to-morrow night."

"Thank God !" ejaculated Joseph Tilbury.
After a pause, he added gratefully—"You are
very good, Truelock, to trouble yourself so
much about such a scoundrel as I have been.
You are very good—you ought to have been
a parson."

"During my absence you must keep quiet,"
the artist replied. "Excitement may put an
end to you before to-morrow. And, mind, you
mayn't drink a drop beyond what Hargreaves
has ordered you to take."

"I won't—on my honour I won't!" the
broken creature protested earnestly. After a
pause, he whimpered hysterically at thoughts
occasioned by his own words, and added—"I
have some honour still."

"Then keep your word, and till I return

drink nothing but what your man gives you."

"I won't. I'll keep my word; for you have been so good to me."

Having shown his satisfaction with this promise by a kindly look and a nod, Noel Truelock was moving away from the sick man's bed, when the patient started quickly, and exclaimed almost violently in his sudden affright—

"You wont leave me till Benson comes back? He'll be back soon. Don't leave me alone! I—I may die if I am left alone."

"Don't be frightened, Tilbury," returned Noel, horrified and disgusted by this exhibition of a cowardice of which the sufferer had never shown any signs in his vigorous days. "Your man has already returned. He came into the outer room five seconds after Mr. Manchester's departure."

"Thank God!" ejaculated the patient; "then I shan't die alone!"

Having called the valet into the bed-room, Noel Truelock gave him a few whispered

words of direction. That done, he approached Joseph Tilbury, took his hand gently, and said—

“Good-bye, Tilbury. Keep as quiet as possible. You may rely on seeing me to-morrow night.”

Two minutes later, Noel Truelock was under the gas-lamps of Regent Street, and walking down the crowded thoroughfare in the direction of the Athenæum Club.

CHAPTER XV.

STARTLING COMMUNICATIONS.

HAVING consumed a mutton cutlet and a pint of claret at the Athenæum Club, and found himself much restored by the repast, of which the excitements of a long and fatiguing day had put him in urgent need, Noel Truelock left his club, and walked to a lodging-house in Jermyn Street, St. James's, that was kept by Mrs. Easterson, the widow of Charles Easterson, whose miniature portraits are well known to the public, and highly esteemed by connoisseurs.

One of those gentlewomen whom reduced circumstances have compelled to earn their livelihood in a humble employment, Mrs.

Easterson was a lady for whom the artist cherished a friendliness almost amounting to affection. She was also a person on whose discretion and secrecy Noel Truelock knew that he might place the most implicit reliance. His interview with Mrs. Easterson was brief but satisfactory. She had a set of rooms at his service, and promised that the person for whom Noel hired the apartments should enjoy perfect privacy and quiet whilst living under her roof.

This matter arranged, Noel Truelock departed from Mrs. Easterson's dwelling, and, with the help of a fast hansom cab, arrived at the Paddington railway station in time for the night express train, by which he had decided to run down to Needham Regis.

In due course he reached that important provincial town, at an hour when its streets were silent and its inhabitants asleep. Fortunately there was a well-horsed fly at the Needham Regis railway station, the driver of which vehicle was willing to make the long

journey to Bridgeham Rookery. Having alighted at his garden-gate shortly before dawn, the artist roused Joe Henschman by throwing pebbles at that faithful servitor's bed-room window, and gained admission to his own house. Though he had been in action or on the road for twenty-four hours, and had not taken a wink's sleep during his journey from town, it was not Noel's purpose to retire to bed. Telling Henschman to stir briskly, light a good fire in the dining-room, and prepare breakfast, he ascended to his dressing-room, and refreshed himself with a cold bath and a careful toilet.

It was broad daylight when the artist sat down to his morning meal, before an exhilarating fire, and regaled himself lesurely. The meal over, he saw his children, visited his stable, and ordered his groom to bring the bay mare and dog-cart to Sunningwold Parsonage at twelve o'clock.

Having delivered this order, and told Henschman of his purpose to return to town at the close of the day, Noel walked briskly over the

frost-hardened fields, by a familiar foot-track, to Sunningwold Parsonage, where he was fortunate in finding Felix Kinsman at home.

Save that there were signs of care in his delicately handsome face, Felix Kinsman appeared to be in his ordinary health, when he received his friend, with an exclamation of astonishment and pleasure, at the front door of the Parsonage.

"Let us go indoors," said Noel, when he had responded to the clergyman's greeting.

In ten seconds the friends were in the study.

"What is it?" asked Felix Kinsman, taking his usual chair, when Noel had seated himself.

"A good deal," Noel returned quietly. "But before I tell you any news, let me hear how the world has gone with you during my absence."

"Well enough," Felix replied evasively, and with an unsuccessful affectation of unconcern. "I walked over to Blyburgh Ruins yester-

day. A long walk, but it has done me good."

"I want to know how affairs went at the Hall yesterday? You have seen Ada Clissold?"

A grave and severe expression came over Felix Kinsman's countenance, as he strove to conceal his excitement whilst answering,

"Yes, I have seen her. I promised to see her and talk with her—and I have kept my word."

"She has accepted you, of course?"

"She has refused me."

"Indeed!"

"I told you that she would refuse me."

"You did."

"But I have the satisfaction of feeling confident that Miss Clissold will be the happier for our intercourse. In fact, that she will get the better of her unfortunate fondness for me."

"I am glad to hear so."

"Enough of that subject for the present, Truelock. Let us talk of something else.

What has brought you from town so suddenly, here so unexpectedly?"

Noel Truelock rose from his chair, took a survey of the Parsonage garden from the study window, resumed his seat, and then, looking steadily in the clergyman's face, answered,

"I spent two or three hours yesterday with an old friend of yours."

"An old friend of mine?" ejaculated Felix Kinsman, changing colour quickly.

"Yes."

"His name?"

"Major Tilbury—Joseph Curtain Tilbury."

"Good Heavens!" the clergyman exclaimed, springing to his feet, and asking wildly, and in varying tones of terror and dismay, "Where did you see that man? How came you to know him? He—he—didn't mention me? How has he discovered me?"

"He has not discovered you. Come, Kinsman, sit down, and be calm; for it is incumbent on me to say much that will agitate you greatly."

Sitting down again, Felix asked,

"But he knows that I am your friend?"

"Not a bit of it," replied the artist, in a reassuring voice. "I did not allow him even to suspect that I knew you."

"Thank God! He does not know that you are my friend! He has not discovered me! I can escape him?"

"Escape him! You have nothing more to fear from him. The man is dying—on the brink of the grave, from which no art can save him for many days. *You* have no need for alarm."

When Felix Kinsman had grown calmer in the course of a couple of minutes, Noel Truelock observed,

"I know every particular of the man's story. He is a prodigious villain!"

"An unutterably wicked man!" Felix Kinsman assented.

"I have known him for years. He was my schoolfellow, though he is considerably older than I am. I know all about his criminal treatment of you at Quebec."

A violent trembling seized the clergyman on hearing these last words. His teeth chat-

tered, his limbs and the muscles of his face twitched convulsively, and a ghastly pallor covered his disfigured countenance, as he faltered,

"Then you know who I am? Oh! Noel!—dear Noel!—be merciful to me!"

Raising his voice, and speaking with affected bluntness, Noel Truelock responded,

"Know you? To be sure I do. You were formerly the Reverend Felix Avalon, of Quebec, but soon after you escaped from the wreck of 'The Mary Queen' you changed your name to Kinsman. And, under the circumstances of the case, I think that you were quite right to change your name. In your position, I should have done the same thing."

Having given the thoroughly scared clergyman this timely assurance of his approbation, Noel Truelock again rose from his seat, and looked out of the window.

On once more facing his companion, Noel saw that Felix Kinsman had already recovered much of his self-possession.

"What's more, Kinsman," the artist continued, resuming his chair, whilst he spoke as though there had been no interval of silence since his last utterance, "I think that you were quite justified in withholding your horribly painful and agonizing story from me. Believe me, my dear friend," he added, in his kindest way, "that having heard that story, I compassionate you from the depths of my heart, and love you more than ever."

"God bless you, Truelock!" ejaculated the clergyman, very sorrowfully and gratefully. "A friend is proved in adversity. I have been in adversity ever since, and long before you knew me."

"True, true, you have, poor boy! But, Kinsman, have you forgiven—can you forgive that man?"

With a solemnity and obvious sincerity, that were very impressive and tenderly touching, the young clergyman answered,

"I forgave him in death's presence, in the terrible fog, on the night before the wreck."

"Ay! ay! but then you had not lost your

only sister. Her death was a consequence of his barbarous villainy."

"True. I have forgiven him that also, Truelock," was the answer. "God knows my heart, and He hears when I declare that I have forgiven Major Tilbury, even as I hope that my sins may be forgiven. May God pardon him, and let him enter Heaven!"

"Kinsman," Noel Truelock asked hesitatingly, "can you consent to see the man and tell him so?"

The proposal caused Felix to start in his chair, and shudder from head to foot.

"He is dying, contrite, dreading death, and under an impression that your pardon, spoken to him by yourself, would open to him the gate of Heaven, from which you would not in your Christian charity have even him excluded."

In a thrilling tone of anguish—a tone expressive of feminine weakness rather than manly sorrow, Felix Kinsman implored,

"Do not ask me to see him! Tell him that I have long ago pardoned him. Take

to him my assurance of forgiveness and prayerful pity. But do not compel me to look at him!"

"Listen to me, my friend," urged Noel Truelock.

"Yes, yes—I am attentive."

Whereupon Noel Truelock told, most precisely and dramatically, how he had encountered the wretched and slowly dying man in the previous May, and was stirred to compassion for him by the unutterable woefulness of his changed countenance. Saying that in old times he had always disliked Joseph Tilbury, and that his late discoveries had only justified his old nervous repugnance to him, he told how he had kept watch for several months over the broken culprit, sinking in bodily torture and in despair to a dreadful eternity. He made Felix Kinsmar understand how the penitent wretch abhorred himself, and was goaded by remorse. He informed him how, in his desire to purge his victim's memory of the shame which he brought upon it, Joseph Tilbury had made

a complete confession of his guilt. And having thus softened the clergyman to his sister's defamer and murderer, Noel entreated his friend to see his abject foe, and assure him that he was forgiven by the brother of the dead woman, whose grave was the everlasting deep.

When the artist had completed this statement and entreaty, Felix Kinsman rose from his chair, and said, with a vehement effort to control his emotions,

"Let me leave you, Truelock, for half an hour. I want to be alone, that I may recover the mastery of myself, think, pray. Keep here, dear Noel, till I return. When I can command myself, and have said a prayer in my bedroom, I will give you my answer."

Having thus spoken, Felix Kinsman left the room.

Almost at the moment which terminated the stipulated half hour, the young clergyman re-entered the study, wearing in his countenance a look of resoluteness and mercy

which informed Noel that his solicitations had overcome his friend's repugnance to the thought of looking again on Joseph Tilbury.

"Let us go to London. I will see him. I forgive him; and, Truelock, I pity him, as I hope that I may be pitied and judged tenderly by you, should you ever be tempted to condemn or think harshly of me."

"Your goodness, Kinsman," returned Noel Truelock, gratefully, "is shown to me as well as to him. I do sincerely thank you."

Felix Kinsman had scarcely taken the artist's outstretched hand, when he turned quickly round to the window, and said, "There are wheels. Whose carriage is that?"

"It is only my dog-cart, that I ordered to come here," was the artist's answer, "in time for our drive to Needham Regis."

Five minutes later, Felix Kinsman was buttoned close in his great-coat, and sitting on the dog-cart by the side of his friend, who drove his fast-trotting mare over to Needham Regis, at the rate of twelve miles in the hour.

CHAPTER XVI.

LIFE AND DEATH.

ON their way from Sunningwold to Needham Regis, and from Needham Regis to London, Noel Truelock exchanged but few words with his fellow-traveller. Each was too fully occupied with his own thoughts and plans for the future, to be curious about his friend's meditations and resolves. It was a run of several hours, but the time passed so quickly that, on emerging from a railway carriage in the Great Western Station in Paddington, Felix Kinsman felt as though the journey had been accomplished in a few minutes. It seemed to him that the trees, and houses, and farm-steads of his rural district must have been

brought within a few miles of the stones, and gas-lamps, and thronged pavements of the capital.

It was evening when the friends drove in a hansom cab from the Paddington terminus to Regent Street; and the thoroughfares, through which they passed rapidly, were brilliant with flaring or sparkling lights, and resonant with the hum of wayfarers, the rattling of carriages, and the shrill screams of street-boys. For a minute Felix Kinsman recalled how the same sights and sounds had affected him when for the first time he drove through the brightness, and uproar, and stir of London by gas-light. He remembered how the action, the clangor, and the stimulating riot of the vast city had stimulated his brain and quickened his pulses with an animation akin to the first excitement produced by generous wine. The manifestations of exuberant life and nervous energy had on that occasion shut out all thoughts of weakness, decay, death. As the foot-passengers raced along the pavements of the broad roads, laughing, gesticulating, eagerly looking for-

wards; as new currents of human action passed into the wider streams by every diverging route and inlet; as groups followed groups, and company pursued company, with never-ceasing followers in their track; as men and women hurried from the opened doors of dazzlingly illuminated shops, and vanished in the tides of rapid passers; as carriages, racing onwards, overtook one another, or, after stopping suddenly for a moment, resumed their noisy progress onwards, there had seemed no place or opportunity for fainting and dying in scenes, so brilliant, various, and exhilarating, where every creature was strong to do, and happy to live.

But now, with thoughts fixed on the transitoriness of human existence, and an imagination busy with the fatal scene to which he was hurrying, all those manifestations of energy, vigor, volition, all those signs of physical strength and mental agitation, were the doings of creatures hurrying onwards to the grave. The quick carriages, following and passing one another at full trot, were full of passengers, hastening

to innumerable death-beds. Those women gliding out of shops, were leaving the places in which they had been buying black robes of sorrow. The men of clerical attire were on their ways to confess dying sinners. Those soldiers, marching along in their bright red coats, were bent on murderous business. Boys sold papers in the streets, that buyers might read the lists of the latest deaths. The bearers of burdens were laden with wool for coffins, cloth for palls. Each creature in the multitudinous throngs was straining muscle, putting out last strength, only to arrive at his appointed grave. It was one grotesque, ghastly dance of death; one universal running of all mankind to destruction! Why did they trouble themselves so? why not wait death's coming? why not lie down and die? Cease from troubling? Lie down? Wait? They could not. Delirious with poisons, administered by the destroyer, they were rushing onwards to the precipices and pits of fate. Pause? They were atoms in the rivers of human life, that flow on, now tranquilly and now tumultuously, now gliding be-

tween placid banks, and now leaping down rocky descents, to the immeasurable, unfathomable ocean of death.

Having dismissed their cab at the doorway of Lansdowne Chambers, Felix Kinsman and Noel Truelock ascended the grand staircase of that palatial establishment, and entered Major Tilbury's suite of rooms, as the clock of St. James's Church was striking a quarter to nine.

They were received in the vestibule of that set of rooms by Benson, who informed Noel Truelock that the Major had been impatient for their arrival during the previous three hours. Dr. Hargreaves had seen the patient twice since early morning, and was of opinion that the dying man could not last out more than another week. The Major was weaker, but his mind was still quite clear. He had kept his promise to refrain from taking more than his prescribed quantity of alcoholic stimulant. At his slight dinner, he had for an instant craved an additional glass of Madeira, but had conquered the desire, saying, "No, I promised Truelock not

to drink, and I have some honour still. The faithful Benson mentioned this circumstance with evident satisfaction, as a fact highly creditable to his master, and indicating that he was not unprepared for a higher life. Having given this report of his employer's condition, Benson remarked that he had provided a good fire, and some excellently manufactured coffee in "the little sitting-room." "Perhaps," suggested the valet, bowing respectfully to the clergyman, "his reverence would like a cup of hot coffee after his cold journey?"

Leaving Felix Kinsman in the enjoyment of a cup of Benson's superlative coffee, Noel True-lock went to Joseph Tilbury's bedroom, and announced to the invalid that Felix Avalon had been brought to Lansdowne Chambers, and was ready to speak to him words of forgiveness and comfort. If the patient was disposed to receive his visitor immediately, the Reverend Felix Avalon should be introduced to him at once.

"Thank God! Let me see him at once," Major Tilbury replied, gratefully.

Raising him a little in his bed, and building up the pillows at his back, Benson placed his master in a position that would enable him to look the clergyman in the face, and speak to him without difficulty. The shaded lamp, at which Mr. Busterby had written down the dying man's deposition on the previous evening, gave a sufficient light to the room.

When Felix Kinsman had entered the apartment, and approached the point at the foot of the bed where he stood throughout his interview with the dying culprit, he was greeted by Joseph Tilbury with appropriate thankfulness.

"It is good of you, sir—very good," Major Tilbury observed fervently, "to show Christian pity to your enemy, and come to his bedside to pardon him."

"Do not thank me, sir," Felix Kinsman answered coldly, but with no harshness. "I am only doing what I conceive to be my duty in coming to you. If my presence affords you relief, and appears to you a mercy, give your

humble thanks to God, from whom all mercies come."

"Sir," resumed the dying man, "I was your sister's murderer—her murderer—as much as if I had shot her with a bullet."

"The lives of all His creatures are in the Lord's hands, Who giveth and taketh away. The misery consequent on your conduct to my sister fell on me; the sin of it was an offence perpetrated against God. In preparing for the eternity on which you will soon enter, Major Tilbury, do not rely on human forgiveness. Think only of yourself, your Maker, and your Saviour's atonement; and in consideration of that atonement, ask God to pardon you for all your grievous sins."

In reply to this counsel, uttered with thrilling solemnity and sublime dignity of tone, Joseph Tilbury moaned faintly, and then implored fervently—

"Pardon me, Mr. Avalon—oh! pardon me! I have confessed all the wrong I did your sister—all the crimes by which I blackened her fame, blasted her happiness, drove her

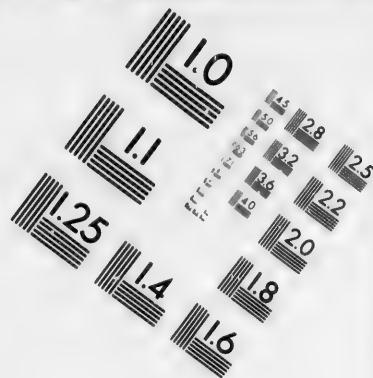
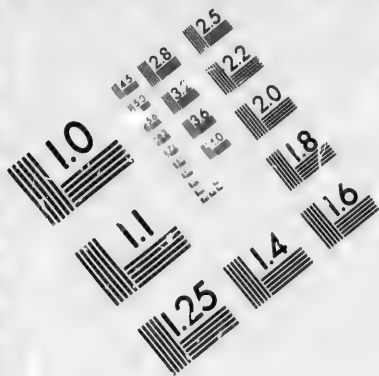
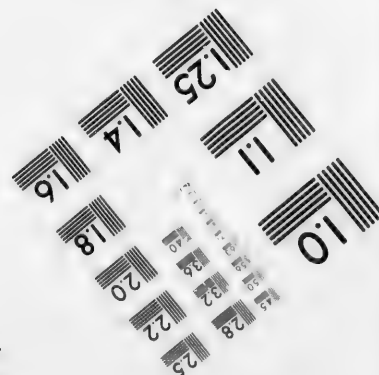
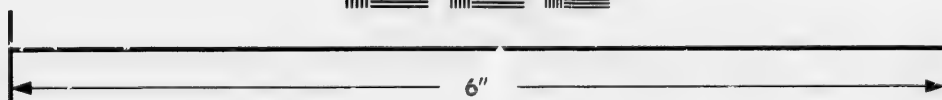
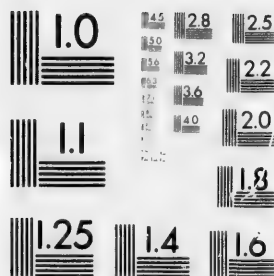


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from her native city, hunted her to death. I have confessed all. In pity pardon me! You are her brother—you are a priest—you are heaven's messenger to me. You *can* pardon me. If *you* won't pardon me, *God won't pardon me*—and," he added, in the screaming voice of an extremely debilitated man driven almost frantic by terror, "*I shall go to hell.*"

As he urged the terrified creature to be calmer, and command his emotions, Felix Kinsman raised his right hand authoritatively; and, seeing that the gesture influenced the patient in a desirable manner, he continued to use the hand in giving emphasis to his next declaration.

"Major Tilbury," the young clergyman said slowly, "I implore you to listen to me attentively. Compose yourself—listen to me carefully, or I must retire. You ask me to pardon you, as though my forgiveness could save you from eternal punishment. I am the man whose sister you injured barbarously, but indeed I have no power to give you the pardon of which you stand in need. I am a priest, but

I have no power to liberate you from the consequences of your wickedness. I supplicate you, as you value your own soul, to free your mind from the delusion under which it labours. Here, however, is priceless comfort for you. If you do really repent of your sins——”

“I do,” Joseph Tilbury interposed fiercely, and with the sincerity of a scoundrel in fear of eternal punishment.

“And,” continued the clergyman, raising his voice, “if, in your penitence, you humbly implore God to pardon you, for dear Christ’s sake, I can, by the authority given to me, assure you that the Almighty will forgive you *all* your sins. This ought to be all the comfort that you desire at this awful hour. But let me assure you, sir, that, so far as I am concerned in your history, my altogether human forgiveness of your crimes is complete. Were I able to pardon you in a higher and larger way, I would pardon you. Were it in my power——”

It was observed by Noel Truelock that, whilst Felix Kinsman spoke thus nervously, distinctly,

and slowly, the dying man raised himself, and, bringing his eyes somewhat nearer to the small white hand which the clergyman extended to him, watched the speaker with a strange eagerness and intense excitement.

"Were it," continued Felix Kinsman, raising his voice slightly, and enriching it with a finer tone of sympathy and commiseration, "in my power to open or close the gate of heaven to you, I would lay you at that gate, and kneeling, I would cry, 'Lord, this sinner repents; for dear Christ's sake, let him enter!' Joseph Tilbury," raising his voice to a yet louder tone, the clergyman added quickly, after a pause, as though during the brief interval of silence he had seen in the penitent's countenance clear evidence of the reality of his contrition, "I—I who have more than any human creature the right to declare your pardon—I, by the authority given to me by grief, by long wretchedness, and Heaven's will, I *do* declare to you that you *are* forgiven."

As he delivered these last words, Felix Kinsman raised both his hands, in manner

of a bishop giving an episcopal benediction.

What was it in the young clergyman's air, face, voice, tone, gesture? Was it something in each and all of them that caused the dying man to stretch forth both hands in supplicatory movement, and ejaculate, in a voice of surprise and delight, "I am forgiven! She forgives! *It is she!*" What was it that, in one short moment, affected him with astonishment, gratitude, triumph, ere he sunk back on his pillows, sighed, let fall his hands, and died.

Yes, he had died! The atom, in one of the innumerable rivers of human life, once known in Her Majesty's Artillery, and London clubs, and other ways of man, as Major Joseph Curtain Tilbury, had reached its destination in the vast, fathomless, motionless Sea of Death!

At the instant when Joseph Tilbury, after sinking back on his pillows, dropped his hands quietly, and in his countenance exhibited the unmistakable and inimitable signs of death, Noel Truelock's eyes were regarding him.

Another instant, and the artist was looking at Felix Kinsman, who, in the dread and terrors

of the crisis that changed his forgiven enemy from a living creature to an insensate corpse, lost his self-command, and succumbed to a sudden faintness, consequent on the various strong agitations which his nervous system had sustained in the course of not many minutes.

For a few brief moments Felix Kinsman tried to rally his shaken energies, conquer the dizziness of his brain by an effort of will, and preserve his vanishing consciousness. But the attempt was unavailing. Bright flashes of fire danced before his eyes; the explosion of fire-arms was audible in his ears; a sense of choking and suffocation deprived him of the power of speech; and he fell, apparently lifeless, into the arms of Noel Truelock, who had hastened to his side in time to save him from dropping upon the floor.

Raising him in his arms, as though the clergyman were a woman, Noel Truelock bore his friend from the chamber of death to the adjoining apartment, where he laid the unconscious man on a sofa, flat upon his back.

Scarcely had the artist taken these judicious steps for his friend's restoration, when Benson, with well-meant officiousness, having left his master's inanimate body, ran up to the sofa, and began to loosen the clergyman's white cravat and collar, at the moment when Noel had turned to the table in search of a spirit-flask.

The valet was not permitted to accomplish his amiable purpose. In a trice he was pulled back, caught up, and lifted from the floor by the artist, who, literally beside himself with excitement, swung the man round in the air, as though the fellow were not heavier than a piece of cord, and then released him with a momentum that caused him to fall like a piece of luggage in a distant corner of the room.

"How dare you presume to touch that gentleman?" cried Noel Truelock, usually so considerate to his inferiors, and so averse to insolent exhibitions of muscular force, but now white with rage and maddened with groundless suspicion, when the valet had regained his legs.

"I meant no harm or disrespect, sir," the man protested.

"Go instantly!—go to your master, and don't dare to enter this room again till I ring for you!" ejaculated Noel Truelock, in the same unaccustomed voice of vehemence and menace.

There was no need for the artist to repeat his order. The valet, more astounded than incensed, left the room as he was bid, and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XVII.

NOEL TRUELOCK BURIES JOSEPH TILBURY, AND
MAKES IT UP WITH MR. BENSON.

ON recovering consciousness, Felix Kinsman was conducted to the lodgings which had been provided for him by Noel Truelock in Mr. Easterson's lodging-house; and there he remained for a fortnight, living in the quiet and strict privacy which Mrs. Easterson had promised Noel that his friend should enjoy under her roof.

During that fortnight the artist saw nothing of his intimate friend; but several letters passed between Mrs. Easterson's second-floor lodger and Mrs. Leonard Donkin's guest at No. 4, Connaught Place, St. John's Wood.

Felix Kinsman wished to be alone and unobserved. On the other hand, the artist was so fully occupied with urgent affairs that he could not have passed much time without inconvenience in Jermyn Street, had his presence been desired by Mrs. Easterson's new tenant.

Joseph Tilbury having left a will, which appointed Noel Truelock the testator's sole executor and residuary legatee, it devolved upon the artist to give instructions for the interment of the deceased officer, and to communicate with various persons who were interested in the Major's life, or in the termination of it. Under any circumstances, the obligations laid upon him by the late Major Tilbury's testament would have occasioned Noel a considerable amount of immediate trouble; but, as he wished to fulfil those responsibilities as soon as possible, he had a super-abundance of business on his hands.

Some twenty of Joseph Tilbury's friends were summoned from Woolwich and the military clubs to Lansdowne Chambers, whence

the funereal train proceeded to Kensal Green Cemetery, and witnessed the interment of the man whose vanity was more accountable than any other quality of his nature for his crimes and degradation.

There was not much emotion observable in any of the gentlemen who stood round the open grave, whilst the chief chaplain of the cemetery read the concluding words of the office for the burial of the dead over Joe Tilbury's coffin; and as soon as the ceremony was accomplished, the mourners dispersed quickly in the pursuit of more congenial excitement.

Noel Truelock returned from Kensal Green to Lansdowne Chambers, to see some tradesmen whose claims on Joseph Tilbury's estate he had promised to settle with most unbusiness-like promptitude, and to find an opportunity for a few friendly words with Mr. Benson, to whom, by-the-way, Major Tilbury had bequeathed a handsome legacy. Truth to tell, the artist was uneasy in his conscience respecting the valet. Of what transpired at

Lansdowne Chambers, in the agitations immediately consequent on Joseph Tilbury's death and Felix Kinsman's swoon, Noel had no clear recollection; but he was troubled by a vague recollection of acts of unseemly violence perpetrated by himself upon the person of a civil and most respectable servant.

"Benson," said Noel, when he had given the valet a cheque for the amount of his legacy, twelve months sooner than the man had hoped to get it, "when my friend Kinsman fainted away the other day, I became very excited and violent."

Smiling drolly, Mr. Benson admitted that Mr. Truelock had been just a trifle agitated, and perhaps rather more than a trifle violent.

"What did I do?"

"Not so very—very much, sir," returned Benson; "you didn't break no bones."

"Ay, but tell me what I did; for I have an indistinct recollection of behaving very badly."

"Well, sir, if you order me to speak, you

caught me up, when I went for to loosen his reverence's cravat, and swung me round, just as if I had been a cat."

"Nonsense! Of course, you have been to your lawyer."

"My lawyer? Bless you, sir, I don't keep a lawyer," returned Benson; "I should as soon think of keeping a pack of hounds."

"But, man, I have assaulted you, treated you with indignity. You should take the law of me."

"No, sir, I thank you. If you had broken my bones, I should have said, 'Mr. Truelock, be good enough to mend them.' If at the time of the little commotion I had thought you in your right senses, and meaning to assault me, I don't say that I would not have turned on you and made a fight of it. But you had not the intention, sir, to wrong me; and it's the intention of bad treatment, not the treatment itself, that riles a Briton into striking for freedom. As for employing a lawyer to pick your pocket, Mr. Truelock," Benson concluded with effusion and much

redness of face, "I'd as soon pay one of the light-fingered gentry to pick it, or do the robbery with my own hand."

"If you were not such a good fellow, Benson," returned Noel, delighted with conduct alike free from meanness and insolence, and eloquent of honesty and right feeling, "you would make me unendurably ashamed of myself. Shake hands with me."

Mr. Benson, a decidedly well-mannered fellow for a person of his degree, was quite ready to shake hands with the artist.

A sudden and happy thought struck Noel whilst shaking hands with the valet; and in a moment the thought was acted upon.

Taking a handsome ring from his finger, a gold ring containing one solitary diamond of considerable size, Noel Truelock said,

"Our hands are just about the same size. This ring will fit your middle finger; and you must wear it, in recollection of my friendly regard for you. If you should ever

be hard up for money, and wish to sell it for twenty pounds, you have my leave to do so."

Mr. Benson was of opinion that Mr. True-lock had "made it up with him" in proper style.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WOMAN AND WIFE.

ON the evening of the seventh day after Joseph Tilbury's funeral, Noel Truelock was sitting before a bright fire in Leonard Donkin's studio, when a female servant brought him a letter.

"Your master and mistress have gone to the theatre?" Noel inquired of the smart-mannered, comely girl.

"And two parties afterwards, Mr. Truelock," answered the maid. "They won't be back till two or three in the morning."

When the young woman had withdrawn, Noel Truelock tore open the envelope of the letter, and read,—

"Jermyn Street, St. James's.

"DEAR NOEL,

"Come and see me to-morrow morning between twelve and two. I do not say this reluctantly. It costs me no effort to consent to your wishes, *now* that you have overcome my scruples, dispelled my fears, and satisfied me that I may seek my own happiness in making you happy. Of my love, so long suspected by you, so much longer known to myself, you need no assurance. It would be absurd of me to make a pretence of generously avowing a state of feeling which you have for months known to exist. But even your mysterious power of piercing hearts and extorting their most jealously guarded secrets has failed to ascertain the fervour and intensity of my love for you. Dear Noel, how shall I show its depth and greatness, its overwhelming forces and passionate vehemence? Not by words, or kisses, and caresses,—but by all my whole life; by the joyful subordination of all my powers of mind, heart, soul, to your

will; by the natural demonstrations of the never-ceasing, ever active, delight that a true woman feels in being the loyal comrade, watchful ministrant, enthusiastic slave of the man to whom she has given her heart. This is a state of mind in which I am in—a state of pleasant surprise, delightful imaginations, intoxicating certainties; the certainty that you are mine,—mine,—my own! the still sweeter and more gladdening certainty that I am yours,—yours,—your own! Then do come to me. Not for another day can I endure to be separated from you. All the bonds and restraints of discipline, fear, policy, deceit have been snapped, and I am free, liberated from self-imposed bondage, and ready to fly to you, if you won't fly to me. All the hateful disguises of my vile hypocrisy and impious masquerade, disguises which in one set of respects deluded the deceiver almost as much as in another set of respects she deceived the world,—have dropt from me; and I see myself, my own, old womanly self, even as you shall see her. Indeed, indeed, dear Noel, I

am a woman in fancy, form, brain, heart, eye, courage, folly, beauty! Indeed! indeed! I am womanly in tastes, temper, spirit, tact, fascination! Do come to me, then. See me with your own eyes, touch my cheeks with your lips. I am a thorough-bred woman,—altogether loveable, if not perfectly lovely.

“And, indeed, dear Noel, notwithstanding all the thousands and millions of evasions, subterfuges, deceits, and impious *lies* involved in my career under the cloth, I am by nature averse to falsehood, even disinclined to artifice. Having forgiven my falsehoods, you must learn to forget them; and I will make you forget them by simple truthfulness and thorough, unqualified frankness, in little matters as well as great. Don’t ever be less generous to me than you are now. You will never suspect or think meanly of me. But should you, dearest Noel, ever remember my innumerable falsehoods with sadness, remember how I was tried, and broken, and poisoned with enmity, and tempted, before I entered on the course

of deceit. Before I left Canada, the devil suggested to me again and again that I could only divest myself of shame by unsexing myself; that my one way of securing myself against fresh exposure, and the continual renewals of the grief and horrors of my persecution, was to assume a man's dress and office, and so separate myself from the infamy of my experiences. When I recognized my position in the gendarme's house at Little Miquelon, it occurred to me again that concealment under the cloth was possible, practicable, advisable, easy. The Ducroix family thought me a clergyman, dressed as I was in the clerical costume that I had donned, merely for convenience's sake. In the pocket of the coat which my brother had lent me, was his pocket-book, containing his 'letters of orders,' together with his notes and letters of credit. He, my old nurse, Captain Deighton, all the crew and passengers of the wrecked steamer had perished. I was like my brother in feature, height, air; I had such learning as he possessed; my pe-

culiar voice was capable of masculine intonations: why then should I not take my brother's place in the world? He had left it, I was in it; the world thinking him alive and me dead. Why should I enlighten the world? Why decline a position and character that I had often desired before accident and misconception had given them? I ought to have resisted the tempter—I know that I ought; but I could not. I was feeble, miserable, hunted by terrors. An unendurable burden of ignominy was upon me, that would slowly press the life out of me if I could not slip from beneath it. So I succumbed. On reaching England I took possession of *my own* property in my brother's name. I assumed his name, title, holy condition. I wrote to three of his clerical friends for letters testimonial to the Bishop of London. Perpetrating the offence of which I had been unjustly found guilty, I wrote to them in a handwriting that was an imitation of his caligraphy. Deceived by the feigned penmanship, they sent me the letters testimo-

nial, duly countersigned by the Bishop of Quebec, and, without difficulty, I procured my appointment to the curacy of St. Jude's, Clerkenwell. You know the rest—have known all this long ago. But remember it, and think of the enormity of my temptations to deceit, whenever you may shudder at the enormity of my falsehood. Dear, dear Noel, remember also how I have been punished at Sunning-wold—with horror at my own wickedness, and the agonizing fear that my successful concealment of my own sex would result in dear Ada's death. Think also of my still sharper punishment in knowing myself to cherish for you a fierce, perpetual, insatiable love, and at the same time believing that my unfeminine action had raised an impassable barrier between my love and the attainment of its hope. In justice to me, be mindful of my temptation and punishment, when you give a thought to my sin. But why should I urge you to be generous to me and considerate for me? You must be both, for you love *me* even as I love *you*.

Oh! dear, dear paper that will touch his hand, lie under his eyes, be lifted to his lips, I kiss you, and cover you with kisses! Fly to him, and bring him to me! Dear, dear Noel, this is another wild, frantic, truthful, passionate letter. But it reflects the state of your impatient, happy, penitent, exultant

“FELICIA AVALON.”

Noel Truelock called the next day in Jermyn Street, St. James's, on the writer of the foregoing epistle. The call was made between the appointed hours, but much nearer twelve than two o'clock; and almost as soon as the artist had entered Miss Avalon's drawing-room, to which apartment Mrs. Easterson conducted him with looks of sympathy, Felicia Avalon greeted him with an emotional fervour corresponding to the warmth of her letter. For a time the woman was literally beside herself with delight in the possession of Noel Truelock, and at her liberation from a bondage of hypocrisy that throughout its continuance had incessantly wounded her

pride, denied to her all participation in womanly pleasures, and shocked her finer sensibilities. Sinking to the floor at the feet of her lover, and throwing her arms round his knees, she exulted in her sense of subjection to masculine government.

"I am a woman again—a woman!" she ejaculated, "at your feet—at your feet!"

"Nay, nay," Noel protested, stooping to raise her, "not at my feet, but in and round my heart."

Rising upon his strong arms, she leaped up, and threw her arms round his neck, covering him with the folds of her morning dress, and with the lovely face, whose lips returned the kiss that he gave them.

"No longer a false actor under the cloth," she murmured, "but yours—yours—for ever!"

"Yes, darling," he responded, tenderly, when he had again kissed her—"soon my wife—my wife for ever!"

A month later, there was a very quiet wed-

ding in St. James's Church, when Mrs. Easter-
son witnessed the union of Noel Truelock and
Felicia Avalon.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARIA PORCHESTER SACRIFICES HERSELF ONCE
MORE.

NOR was Noel Truelock's the only marriage that occurred in the circle of our Sunningwold friends in 1869. Felicia Avalon was married in the January of that year, and in the following December, when the Squire of Sunningwold and his family had laid aside their mourning for Jemmy, Reuben Bloxham and Ada were joined together in holy matrimony, in the church where Felix Kinsman used to preach to overflowing congregations of rustic auditors.

It was Noel Truelock's good fortune to be instrumental in bringing about an arrange-

ment that made Reuben, from a pecuniary point of view, an equal match for a young lady of Ada's position and prospects. Through the retirement of an aged commissioner, and the almost simultaneous deaths of two superior clerks of the Internal Control Department, promotions were on the point of being made in Reuben Bloxham's office, when the artist induced the Duchess of Trelawney to exercise her powerful influence with her nephew, Lord Peppercorn, in Reuben's behalf. Viscount Peppercorn, as all the world knows, is the minister who, two years since, was omnipotent over the Internal Control and half-a-dozen other departments of the Civil Service. At first the patriotic young Viscount refused sternly to act upon his gracious aunt's representations; but, on learning that Reuben was universally popular at the Board of Control, and possessed the reputation of being a rare example of official virtue, his lordship relented so far as to say that, since Mr. Bloxham was well heard of, he should not be overlooked in the new arrangements. On receiving this intelligence

from Noel, the Deputy-Assistant Surveyor began to hope that he should be raised to the Surveyor-General's post, with a salary of nine hundred a year. But grander fortune awaited him. Whether the Duchess of Trelawney's influence with her ward, the Honourable Frances Sardine, affected in any way the judgment of her virtuous nephew, the obscure writer of this page cannot say; but it is certain that in the same number of the *Morning Post* which announced the matrimonial engagement of Viscount Peppercorn and the Honourable Frances Sardine, the heiress of Pentloe, there appeared a paragraph stating that Her Majesty had been pleased to appoint Reuben Bloxham, Esq., to be one of her Commissioners of Internal Control. The salary of the commissionership being £2,000 a year, it was thought in the neighbourhood of Sunningwold that Miss Ada Clissold had, in a worldly sense, done very fairly in deciding to become Mrs. Reuben Bloxham.

In the January following Ada's marriage, *i. e.*, January 1870, Squire Clissold appeared in the

studio of the handsome house on Campden Hill, Kensington, where Noel Truelock established himself immediately after his second marriage. Noel was working on a canvas when his old friend and former neighbour appeared on the scene, with a countenance expressive of unusual joyousness.

"And how are they getting on at Sunning-wold?" Noel inquired, when he had laid down brushes and pallet, and greeted his visitor with almost boisterous cordiality.

"Well enough," answered Hardy Clissold, smiling away with six Cherubim power, "well enough, though we miss you. I could forgive your wife taking me and all my neighbours in as she did, if she would consent to live at Bridgeham Rookery."

"Ah," returned Noel, with a comical look in his handsome face, "I am afraid that you will never see her there."

"But still we get on tolerably well without you," resumed the Squire. "Maria Porchester is a wonderful woman!"

"What is Mrs. Porchester doing now?"

"At her old game, Noel—sacrificing herself. There never was such a woman for self-sacrifice. What do you think she is going to do now?"

"Impossible for me to guess, sir."

"I have come up here to tell you, and see Ada, and tell her. By Jove, you'll never guess. I have persuaded Maria Porchester to sacrifice her entire self, and marry me! It's true. I'm not trifling with you. She is a wonderful woman!"

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Noel Truelock, sincerely pleased with an arrangement that, he felt sure, would afford the kindly gentleman happiness, "I congratulate you, and I'll write to Mrs. Porchester to-day, commending her heartily for her goodness."

After a pause, during which he wiped his broad face with a yellow silk handkerchief, Hardy Clissold said,

"Positively, Truelock, such is that woman's passion for self-sacrifice, that she does not half like the notion of my making a liberal settlement upon her. She would prefer to marry

me without a settlement, and, as she says, depend altogether on my generosity!"

"And do you mean to gratify her in that particular?" Noel inquired.

"Good Heavens, sir!" exclaimed Hardy Clissold hotly, turning very red in the face, and bright in the eyes, "do you think I am a scoundrel, to take advantage of a woman's noble spirit? Do you think I am the man to rob the woman who is bent on sacrificing herself for me? She would be only too happy to ruin herself for me. But I'll take care that her virtue gets its proper reward for once. Ay, that I will!"

And far from discouraging the Squire's generous intentions towards Mrs. Porchester, when they came to hear them, Ada and Reuben felt and expressed cordial approbation of their father's munificent designs for his self-sacrificial partner.

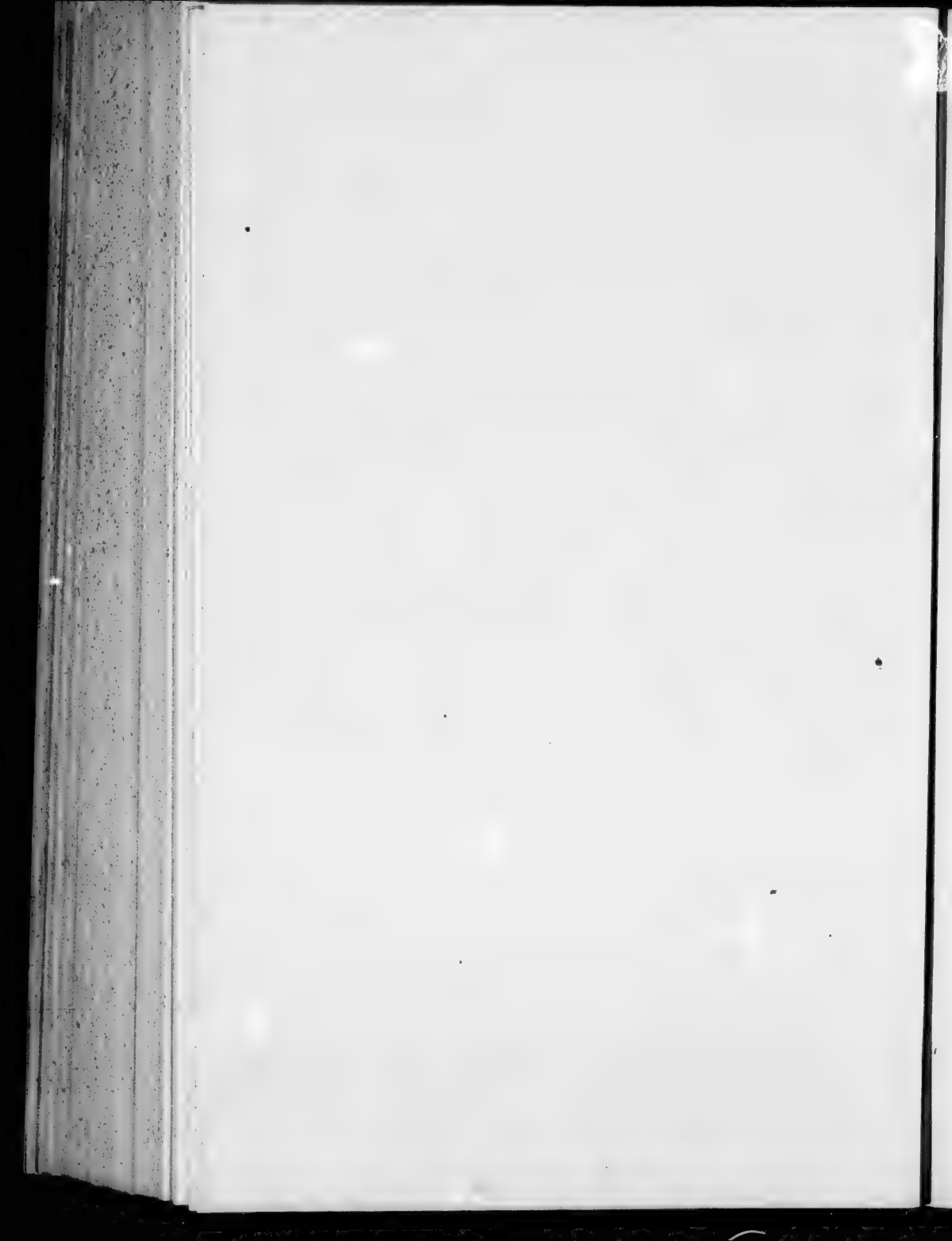
Enough. The three marriages seem likely to afford to their respective couples more than ordinary happiness. Isa and Trottie are vehemently fond of their new mamma, and as they have not hitherto discovered her strong likeness

to Mr. Felix Kinsman, whom they have by this time almost forgotten, it is not probable that they will ever see the resemblance. Felicia Truelock is the mother of a superb little boy ; and Ada has begun to talk in a most matronly fashion about *my* nursery.

THE END.

this
that
elicia
boy ;
only

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